

Background Paper

# Crisis Discourses in Europe

Media EU-phemisms and Alternative Narratives

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# Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Thoughts on Theory: Searching for Public Discourse
4. European Crisis Discourses: Case Studies
5. Euro Crisis in the Press: The Politics of Public Discourse
6. European Crisis Discourse: Themes
7. Conclusion and Implications

References

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All errors and omissions remain my own.

Tamsin Murray-Leach

## Executive Summary

It would be catastrophizing to claim that Euroscepticism won the recent European elections – but it certainly staked a claim. Two years ago, we predicted the capturing of Europe by populist parties in our study of progressive activists in Europe, *The ‘Bubbling Up’ of Subterranean Politics in Europe* (Kaldor and Selchow 2012). What that report found was that Europe, as a political space, was invisible to the majority of these activists; at worst, it was considered part of the problem in the current moment of crisis. With this background paper, we set out to explore the dominant discourses around the eurocrisis to understand why there appears to be such a mismatch between the concerns of these actors and the way in which the crisis is framed in the dominant discourse. What we found confirmed what was suggested by our initial report: that these (primarily mediatised) narratives have (mis) represented the crisis as a predominantly economic one, rather than addressing the political concerns of these subterranean actors. It is a framing that discursively rules out alternatives to the prominent executive actors and their prescribed solutions, and which maintains political Europe as a distant ‘other’ to the majority of Europeans. Furthermore, in the course of investigating the sources of these narratives, we found that there is a frequent misreading of ‘media discourse’ as ‘public discourse’, which both assumes that there is a dialogical relationship between European citizens and European policy makers where none exists, and leads both researchers and policymakers to overlook genres of discourse that have the potential to revitalise the European project from the bottom-up.

In partnership with LSE’s *Euro Crisis in the Press* team, the background paper reviews the latest empirical studies on media coverage of the eurocrisis across the continent, analyses national and trans-European polling data, and draws upon collaborations with academics from across Europe who are working on projects related to perceptions of the crisis. The paper thus acts both as literature review and (non-statistical) meta-analysis of the current research available.

Four primary themes emerge across this data:

- The crisis is portrayed as an *abstract given*, virtually a ‘supernatural phenomenon’, and almost exclusively as an economic one. This rules out discussions of agency, of causes, or of how the crisis might be overcome; indeed one of the findings is that there is a lack of in-depth coverage of the potential political and economic roots of the crisis across the data.
- The European Union is regularly represented, in the narrative/s of the crisis, as a *foreign ‘other’*, linked to, if not directly blamed for, suffering – of the home nation, of the so-called PIGS/PIIGS, and of the member states in general. Member states may also be ‘othered’ in relation to the home nation; by contrast, solidarity is rare.
- This framing of Europe as ‘foreign’ takes place despite the fact that the crisis discourse reveals a high-level of *European integration*, with both political actors and the media taking part in, and responding to, crisis debates occurring in other European nations than the home nation.
- However, this narrative is also skewed almost entirely to coverage of national and European executives and economic ‘experts’. It is a *discourse of elites*. The Europe of the crisis is not framed as an arena for European citizens, but rather one that is imposed upon them from a remote, bureaucratic and decidedly top-down machine.

The result is a de-politicisation not only of the crisis, but of the European institutions that are seen to manage it. 'Politics' becomes remote machinery, led by executives, which the average European has no chance of affecting. It is a narrative that perpetuates the opinions of the actors interviewed in our first study: that formal politics have failed, and that Europe, as a political space, is invisible.

Thus the key implication of this paper is that 'Europe' must be politicized. Rather than pander to the Eurosceptic victories, it is necessary for both policymakers and the media to prioritise new political conversations over formal mechanisms; to open up the narrative on the future of Europe so alternative voices can be heard, to create a genuine 'public discourse' that looks to the future rather than one that hides in the past.

## Introduction

“There is a real risk that if Europe remains invisible, perceptions of the European Union will be captured by populist parties, who already stress their euro-scepticism. Such euro-scepticism could easily appeal (reluctantly, perhaps) to those who do not debate and discuss Europe but nevertheless have inchoate notions of Europe as a neo-liberal bureaucratic project in which decisions are opaque and undemocratic.”

*‘The “Bubbling Up” of Subterranean Politics in Europe’, Kaldor and Selchow, June 2012*

In researching this background paper, we aimed to grasp the variety of ‘crisis discourses’, or narratives, across Europe, in order to understand why Europe remains at best, invisible, and at worst, antithetical as a political space for progressive actors looking to promote social justice across Europe. Looking at contemporary research into media discourses, trans-European data on the ‘public discourse’ and case study ‘snapshots’ of individual European nations in crisis, what we found were strikingly similar crisis narratives across the continent. Again and again, the crisis is framed as an abstract entity, rather than the result of political as well as economic choices; it is portrayed as a ‘supernatural phenomenon’ (p.18), and an almost exclusively economic process which politicians can only hope to ‘manage’. Crucially for the future of the European project, despite a political discourse around the crisis that actually evidences increasing levels of European integration, media crisis discourse across the continent frames ‘Europe’ as *foreign*; as ‘the other’. While the *impacts* of the economic downturn are matters to be dealt with at the national level, through austerity policies and individual responsibility – ‘we’re all in this together’<sup>1</sup> – the ‘eurocrisis’ is an external matter, from a Europe that predominantly affects the national negatively. Furthermore, although media discourse of the crisis highlights the *suffering* of citizens across the European Union<sup>2</sup>, it is not framed as citizens’ discourse; rather, it is almost exclusively a discourse of elites – of foreign executives, of economists and financiers. National and local politicians barely get to contribute to this discourse, let alone civil society – or ‘subterranean’ actors of any stripe.

In our efforts to illuminate these narratives, we have deliberately used a broad, ‘everyday’ (Dijk 1997a) definition of ‘public discourse’, not only to uncover alternatives to the dominant narrative, but in order to problematize the notion. What our research finds is that there is frequent misreading of ‘media discourse’ as ‘public discourse’, which we believe contributes to maintaining the ‘invisibility’ of Europe for European citizens. Firstly, it assumes that there is a dialogical relationship between citizens and representatives where none exists, contributing to the ‘hollowing out’ of substantive democracy. Secondly, it leads researchers and policymakers to overlook genres of discourse that have the potential to revitalise the European project ‘from the bottom-up’.

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<sup>1</sup> David Cameron’s speech at the Conservative Party conference in 2009, in which he blamed ‘Britain’s culture of irresponsibility’ and ‘big government ... spending’ for ‘our broken economy’ (Cameron 2009).

<sup>2</sup> We do not refer to ‘European citizens’ as the suffering is typically ascribed to either citizens of individual nations or to member *states*, not ‘European citizens’ as a group; see Section 6.

What we try to do here is to provide a ‘snapshot’ of the dominant ‘public discourse’ across Europe, attempting to highlight key features of the mismatch between this narrative and the views of the subterranean actors that we explored in our first project, *The ‘Bubbling Up’ of Subterranean Politics in Europe* (Kaldor and Selchow 2012; see ‘Background’ below) . In collaboration with the LSE Euro Crisis in the Press team, we have reviewed the latest empirical studies on media coverage of the ‘eurocrisis’ across the continent, and worked with academics from other European research projects on perceptions of the crisis to establish the dominant narrative of the crisis in the months leading up to the European elections of 2014. We have also analysed national and trans-European polling data, and looked for the presence of counter, or alternative narratives in the initiatives of both populist and progressive ‘subterranean’ actors.

The report proceeds with a review of the background to the project. A short theoretical section attempts to problematize, and briefly review the literature on, the notion of ‘the public discourse’ for non-academics and academics alike. This is followed by the case studies: reports on the crisis discourse/s in Germany, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Italy and Belgium. Next, the findings of the first year of the *Euro Crisis in the Press* project are summarised. ‘Themes’ (Section 6) analyses these various case studies in conjunction with trans-European data from large-scale media studies and opinion polls, and summarises our findings. The concluding section discusses the implications of these findings, and suggests policy considerations and avenues for future research.

## Background

What is perhaps most shocking about the recent results of the European elections of May 2014 is that, to many, they were such a shock. Those who have been studying populist and protest initiatives since the economic downturn of 2008 have been only too aware of the rise of Eurosceptic and nationalist parties, and have been predicting their growing electoral success with increasing urgency. Something profound has been happening across the continent, and we do not mean simply the consequences of the debt crisis for the Euro. We mean the increasing dissatisfaction of citizens with their national democratic institutions and a growing general distrust towards political elites, accompanied by a rejection of EU bureaucracy and collective questioning of the European project.

While in mainstream political circles the nature of the current ‘crisis’ has been predominantly read as an *economic* one, understood through the lens of the global economy and financial markets, Europe has in fact been undergoing a crisis that is (also) profoundly *political*. This was the conclusion that we were able to draw from our OSF-supported study, *The ‘Bubbling Up’ of Subterranean Politics in Europe*. Conducted at the beginning of 2012 in collaboration with seven field research teams across Europe, the project was established to map the ‘bottom-up’ debate about the future of Europe, elucidate emerging political dynamics and identify key nodal points where change might be possible. What we discovered was a fundamental mismatch between the narrative of ‘crisis’ in Europe held by policy-makers and discussed in the mainstream media, and the concerns of actors engaged in what we call ‘subterranean politics’ – currents of opinion, new political initiatives, and various forms of grassroots activism and protest that are not usually visible in mainstream political debate but which ‘bubbled up’ and resonated with the public consciousness in the protests of 2011 (Kaldor and Selchow 2012). Although the actions of the latter have been predominantly framed as direct and causal reactions to austerity measures and to the precarious economic situations in many European countries or, such as in the case of Occupy, as actions motivated by ‘anti-globalization’ or even anti-capitalist sentiments, our research indicated rather that these were the manifestations of a profound crisis of the *belief* in political elites and in democracy as it is currently practiced across Europe. Furthermore, for these subterranean actors, Europe as a political space was perceived as irrelevant at best; a bureaucratic servant of the neo-liberal market ethos at worst.

That is not to say that there are no pro-European initiatives for reforming or transforming the European Union (EU); numerous multi-signatory manifestos and campaigns have emerged over the past few years. But our research found that these initiatives came almost exclusively from what we called ‘expert activists’ – actors who tend to be institutionalised, working within elite policy-making circles in a top-down approach, following a logic of action referred to as ‘the way of reason’ (Pleyers 2010) – compared to the prefigurative, experimental, creative, bottom-up ‘way of subjectivity’ practiced by the majority of subterranean actors. These appeals seem to have remained in the realm of mainstream policy circles, slowly chipping away at the dominant crisis narrative<sup>3</sup> but making very

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<sup>3</sup> Such as the proposed Financial Transactions Tax, see Monaghan (2014).

little dent on the overall discourse. Writing on the politicization of European integration months before the election, scholars Grande and Kriesi presciently noted:

‘Thus far, the politicization of European integration has not been caused by the supporters of the European project in the first place [...] In election campaigns and public debates, the critics of European integration and the defenders of national identity and sovereignty have been much more successful in mobilizing European citizens. From a normative perspective which promotes a “cosmopolitan Europe”, the current politicization of Europe must be interpreted as disappointing if not frightening.’ (Grande and Kriesi 2014: forthcoming)

Why are these alternatives not breaking through, and reaching a wider audience? And why does Europe as a political space remain invisible for subterranean actors – as well as for the millions of European citizens who did not use their vote in the elections? Our first report concurs with the work of Grande and Kriesi, who argue that the European integration process must be understood in the context of a more fundamental transformation of Western Europe: not a simple pro-/anti-EU dichotomy, but a much deeper ‘cleavage’ of integration versus demarcation, and cosmopolitanism versus nationalism, that has emerged over the past two decades due to the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalization, and which has been ‘intensified’ but not ‘transformed’ by the economic downturn (Grande and Kriesi, *ibid*). We would add to this the growing cleavage between formal versus substantive democracy; like the subterranean actors that the report analysed, many of those who voted for the diverse group of new anti-establishment, Euro-sceptic MEPs have expressed their frustrations with politics-as-usual, as have the Euro-sceptic parties themselves. Yet a narrative of deep political crisis is not one that was apparent, for the most part, in the mediatised public discourse around the ‘Euro-crisis’: rather, it became clear to us during the course of the Subterranean Politics study, particularly as we presented and discussed our findings in various public contexts, that what was especially peculiar and worrying was that the political crisis is evolving off the radar of mainstream commentators, many social and political scientists and, most problematically, the majority of political decision makers.

It is this crisis-discourse across that determines how the ‘crisis’ is perceived and, therefore, prescribes and restricts where and by whom solutions are to be found. The misreading of what is currently going on in Europe is deeply problematic, skewing the debate in economic terms, and determining who are the ‘legitimate’ and ‘trusted’ experts, who are ‘invited’ to look for solutions and to whom others listen. It discursively rules out radical alternatives, so that instead of debate and transformation, we see the old political parties now making moves to address the symptoms of the crisis – the anti-immigration, Euro-sceptic stance of the new anti-establishment MEPS – rather than addressing root causes.

In order to recapture the debate about what is currently happening in Europe to enable a widening of the public and political understanding of the crisis as more than an *economic* crisis, but rather a deeply *political* one that goes beyond public frustration with austerity measures and Euroscepticism, the dominant narrative first needs to be problematized. We hope that this snapshot of the current crisis-discourse provides a first step towards that.

## Thoughts on Theory: Searching for the Public Discourse

What exactly are we looking for when we attempt to uncover the 'public discourse'? In Section 6, we review a number of large-scale research projects that address aspects of public debate and public perceptions around the 'Eurocrisis' and which focus their attentions on the media; or, more specifically, on a narrow segment of the printed press. This method of locating the public discourse in the media is not restricted to studies concerning the 'Eurocrisis'; numerous scholars and a number of large-scale projects have studied the relationship of the demos and the public sphere through the media in Europe and beyond.<sup>4</sup> This section does not attempt to enter the theoretical debate on this relationship, which criss-crosses the disciplines of the social sciences. Rather, it is an attempt to briefly review and problematize the notion of 'the public discourse' for non-academics and academics alike, given how frequently researchers, policy makers and journalists espouse or lay claim to the term (or a variant such as 'public opinion') with little apparent awareness of its limitations.

As Djik (1997a) notes in his overview the subject, the word 'discourse' is highly ambiguous. It can be used to describe a single incident, a singular genre of discourse (eg. 'political discourse' – which itself is mostly likely to be made up of multiple discourses), or a plurality of discourses. It can refer to a specific piece of speech or text, or a broad type of social phenomenon. Outside of the academy, according to Djik, we typically understand discourse in a 'common sense', 'everyday language' manner, meaning what somebody says, in speech or text, and the how, why and when of these speech acts. The media, notes Djik, and some of the social sciences, may also use 'discourse' in an 'everyday' way when referring to certain sets of ideas and ideologies (see also Purvis and Hunt 1993), in an unsophisticated appropriation of 'discourse' as the medium and prize of the struggle for power (*ibid*: 489), as posited by Foucault.<sup>5</sup>

'Public discourse', as a class of discourse, is very often used and understood in this loose, 'everyday', 'common sense' manner. There is an assumption that it refers to something broader than all speech acts that occur in the public realm, but the defining lines are blurred. So schoolchildren chattering in the street are most likely engaging in 'gossip', not 'public discourse' – but what if the same group are discussing student loans policy, and contemplating joining up with a protest to join a debate that started on Twitter? Similarly, we would assume that post-work banter in the pub is most likely not 'public discourse' – but that banter turns to discussion on union action, which turns into an act of political organisation; a decision to go on strike?

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<sup>4</sup> For an extensive example and overview, see the 'Eurosphere: Towards a Citizen's Europe' project ([www.eurospheres.org](http://www.eurospheres.org)), and in particular reports 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 on 'The Role of Print and Broadcast Media in the Articulation of the European Public Sphere' (Selmeczi and Sata 2011; Bakalova and Zografova 2011) and the working paper 'An Overview of Research on the European Public Sphere' (Bärenreuter et al., 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Who himself was at pains to distinguish between ideology and discourse (see Foucault 1980).

In order to identify and delimit any particular discourse, it is necessary to apply a theoretical notion of discourse to the topic (Dijk 1997a). It is perhaps surprising then, how few of the research projects investigating public perceptions and media coverage of the crisis actually do this with a critical stance, even when taking a discourse analysis-style approach. Unfortunately, ‘discourse analysis’ is used only marginally less ambiguously than ‘discourse’ itself. The approach of a piece of discourse analysis may be descriptive, applied, theoretical and/or critical; it may be empirical or more philosophical; its disciplinary base may be linguistic, psychological, or from the broader social sciences (*ibid*). What dimensions of discourse are useful in this context?

Media, communications, discourse studies and democratic all have plenty to offer on the subject, but a definition from legal theory is an interesting starting point because of its application. In his paper ‘Participatory Democracy as a Theory of Free Speech’ (2011), dean of Yale Law School Robert Post defines public discourse in the context of US constitutional theory – and practice. He posits that that decisions over the application (and non-application) of the First Amendment right to free speech doctrine are best seen as relying upon ‘the value of democratic self-governance’ (*ibid*: 482), and argues that contrary to some interpretations, this value does not merely attach to the audience of speech, and therefore to collective decision making, but rather that ‘democracy is achieved when those who are subject to law believe that they are also potential authors of law’ (*ibid*).

In short, democratic self-governance requires that all citizens are able to participate in the formation of public opinion – and it is the speech acts and communication that go into forming this public opinion that he defines as public discourse. In Post’s definition, public discourse is not about defining truths or falsehoods in the creation of public knowledge; it is strictly a discourse that involves the effort to change (or maintain) democratic self-governance. This does not mean that public discourse only deals in politics directly; Post holds that ‘[a]rt and other forms of noncognitive, nonpolitical speech fit comfortably within the scope of public discourse’ (*ibid*: 486) because these are all processes that go into forming public opinion. Post’s definition holds with the ‘recurrent theme [in the] voluminous literature on [...] public discourse [...] that, in a democracy, public discourse can and should empower citizens, give them voice and agency, build community and help citizens to act on behalf of their interests and values’ (Gamson 2001:56). Public discourse defined as such then is, to borrow the title Dijk’s (1997b) second volume, *discourse as social interaction*.

And a key notion underpinning ‘public discourse as social interaction’ as a key element of the dialogical relationships of democracy is the theoretical notion of the ‘public sphere’, as conceptualized originally by Habermas (1996) and refined and challenged by numerous scholars since (see Fraser et al., 2014)<sup>6</sup>. Again, this is a notion oft removed from its specific theoretical roots and used by the academy, and, to a lesser extent, the media, to describe an actually existing entity ‘where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly’ (see Bennett and Entman 2001:2-3). Even a rigorous legal scholar like Post falls into this trap, noting merely that ‘public discourse depends on the maintenance of a public sphere, which is a sociological structure that is a prerequisite to the formation of public opinion’ (2011:486). He proceeds to claim that media ‘are major components of

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<sup>6</sup> The Wikipedia entry on ‘public discourse’ redirects to ‘public sphere’, supporting the claim that this is a ‘common sense’, ‘everyday’ understanding of the phrase.

this structure and ... the historical grounds for its emergence' (*ibid*) – without questioning either the existence of a 'public sphere', nor the media's role within it. While it is true that an ideal-type media assuming the role of 'Fourth Estate' (Schultz 1998) plays the role of interlocutor between citizen and polity in Habermas's ideal-type public sphere (Habermas 1996; see also Gottschalck 2012:5-6; and Bärenreuter, C. et al. 2009:10), it is naïve to translate this uncritically from the theoretical world to the actual.

There is no doubt that the media has an role to play in (*in*)forming 'public opinion'. The extent to which it does so has been long debated in media, communications and discourse studies, and the arguments on agenda-setting, gate-keeping and other aspects of the information selection and filtering process have been revived and revised in the great tidal surge of commentary and research produced in the past decade or so on social media. However, of the relatively little in-depth empirical work carried out on the extent to which people's interpretation of events is affected by the framing of news stories, the findings of the Glasgow University Media Group project (Philo 1993) are unequivocal. Unless informed by their own direct experience, or by informers with direct experience of an event featured in the news, participants consistently replicated the media's framing of events – to the extent of repeating not only key themes but individual key words used by the media a year previously when attempting to write a news story in their own words<sup>7</sup>. Like all good communications scholars, Philo is keen to point out that 'it would be wrong to see people as being totally dependent on such messages, as if they are simply empty vessels ... to accept and believe what is seen on television is as much a cultural act as the rejection of it. Both ... are conditioned by our beliefs, history and experience.'" (*ibid*:261).

But is this 'cultural act' always a conscious one? And whether it is or not, does to accept or to reject constitute *social interaction* and therefore make a contribution to the 'public discourse'? Few scholars today describe the media as a reflection or mirror of social reality; it is more likely to be appraised 'as an artefact and a practice in which society is both reproduced and contested' (Schröder 2002). But who is doing the contesting? Political elites may indeed being able to interact and influence the media agenda as the media influences public opinion (see Gottschalck 2012), but is this truly 'public discourse'? Even just to use the word 'public' uncritically masks important assumptions at play. Louw (2005) surmises that 'publics' are actually 'the ultimate "hyper" construct' (*ibid*:32) and are themselves assembled by mass media. Rather than citizens actively engaging in dialogical 'social interactions', what so-called public opinion really represents, claims Louw, 'is a dramatic media-ization of experience wherein individuals become a "public" or passive followers, "guided" by the limited agendas presented to them by the media' (*ibid*).

And if the public is essentially a passive one, not engaged in social interaction with the media, then this raises the question of whether what is then being studied as 'public discourse' is actually 'public discourse' at all, or is rather a hegemonic discourse-as-ideology that is being proffered *to* the public from an/multiple elite/s. In their work on the 'ideological loading [...] and relations of power which underlie [discourse]' (1997:258), Fairclough and Wodak claim that 'most people have no access whatsoever' to public discourse as mediated by the print and broadcast press. Indeed, one might ask if

we in fact confuse ‘media discourse’, as a class or order of discourse, for ‘public discourse’. In other words, one needs to ask whether the (mainstream) media *constitutes* public discourse (for it is often treated as such by both academics and policy makers – see section 4); is an *example* of or *representative* of public discourse (again, it often used as such) or is merely the *mediator* of *political discourse* to mass publics in a top-down non-dialogical relationship (comments sections and pages notwithstanding).

There have been significant changes in the media landscape and therefore to what constitutes and who has access to ‘the public discourse’ since the advent of the Internet, of course – and again, this is often overlooked by studies which rely upon datasets gathered from print media, where circulation figures have dropped considerably. As recently as 2001, Bennett and Entman noted the demise of ‘the halcyon days of television’s dominance’ (2001: 13) worrying that, with cable television, the ‘commonality of public engagement’ would be diminished (*ibid*: 17). The academic jury is still out on whether the digital landscape broadens or narrows access to alternative discourses (see Pariser 2011; Shirky 2008; Moore and Selchow 2012), and recent polling figures indicate trust in the Internet is less than in broadcast media or the press – and that trust has declined in those who use it the most, namely the young (Eurobarometer 2013). Various alternatives to the mainstream crisis narrative(s) that have come into being through the medium (and, arguably, ‘2.0’ culture; see Moore and Selchow 2012; Kaldor and Selchow 2012) of the Internet are discussed in the case studies that follows, but these have yet to impact the mainstream crisis narrative, other than as challenges to the status quo that ‘bubble up’ from the realm of subterranean politics (*ibid*).

The fact that increasing numbers of people get their news from the Internet than from print media (in the US, Internet news readership surpassed print readership in 2011; see Pew Research Center 2011), is yet another indication that to (mis)read ‘media discourse’ as ‘public discourse’ is hugely problematic, both for researchers and for the policymakers who accept this ‘everyday’ interpretation of ‘public discourse’ as fact and act upon it. This is dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, it supports the assumption that that a democratic dialogical relationship amongst citizens and representatives exists, as does a ‘public sphere’, which then precludes the need to ensure that this is actually the case – resulting in a ‘hollowing out’ of democracy. And secondly, such a misreading overlooks genres of discourse that potentially do contribute to ‘public discourse’ as social interaction which attempts to effect political change – and in doing so, excludes many participants from the political process.

## European Crisis Discourses: Case Studies

On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013, a meeting to discuss ‘The Crisis Discourse Across Europe’ was held at OSIFE in Barcelona to launch this project. In attendance were Susan Treadwell, Belen Marin and Leonie van Tongeren of OSIFE; Paolo Gerbaudo, lecturer in Digital Society and Culture at Kings, who works with Mario Pianta on the study of ‘European Alternatives’, civil society pro-European transformation and reformation projects; Lila Caballero, of Counterpoint, senior researcher on the long-term programme of research and advocacy, ‘Reluctant Radicals’ (<http://counterpoint.uk.com/projects/reluctant-radicals-2/>); Laura Chaqués Bonafont, of the University of Barcelona, director of the Spanish Policy Agendas Project, which has been monitoring public policy in general and as represented in the media since 1994 (<http://www.ub.edu/spanishpolicyagendas/researchteam/>); Moritz Sommer of the Free University Berlin, a researcher on the GGCIRSI project (see below); Erin Saltman of University College London, consultant on Hungarian civil society; and Hara Kouki of the European University Institute, co-editor of *The Greek Crisis and European Modernity* (2013). Also present were Professor Mary Kaldor and Tamsin Murray-Leach of the London School of Economics’ Civil Society and Human Security Unit, and Henry Radice from the LSE’s Euro Crisis in the Press research team.

Much of what was discussed in the meeting is discussed in context in the different sections of this paper; it has also informed the coding frame and questions of the upcoming empirical work of the LSE Euro Crisis in Press project. This section begins with the three country-specific case studies that were first presented in Barcelona – snapshots of the crisis discourse in the months prior to the European election (November 2013-March 2014) from: Germany, most likely to be portrayed by the European media as the country most likely to benefit from the crisis (Reuters Institute 2014; see Section 6); Greece, most likely to be portrayed as the worst-suffering ‘debtor’ nation of the crisis (*ibid*); and Hungary, an outlier in the dominant ‘Eurocrisis’ discourse, with a domestic perception of ‘crisis’ that differs in kind to that of the western European nations. These three are followed by three developed following the methodology of the Barcelona meeting with students in the Global Civil Society stream of the M.Sc. in Global Politics at the LSE. The Spanish study examines a nation that has gone from a highly pro-European to a Eurosceptic position in a relatively short period of time, and which has seen some of the most visible displays of subterranean politics in response to the impacts of the crisis in the occupations of the *indignados*. Italy as a case study is particularly interesting in that it demonstrates very clearly the *political* over the *economic* aspect of the crisis. This section closes in Belgium, ‘home’ to the EU and a discourse divided along multiple lines.

These case studies attempt to offer snapshots of the ‘public discourse’ on the crisis in different national contexts. The authors draw on a mixture of sources, including poll data, academic research, and media content analysis and commentary. But they also draw on their own experiences of political agency in their respective national contexts, and on informal interviews with other European citizens. As with the blog entries summarised in the section on the LSE Euro Crisis in the Press project to date, these insights into ‘the public discourse’ across Europe are a blend of research, reportage and opinion, rather than extrapolations from rigorous, coded datasets such as those used by the research projects described in Section 6. Yet they are no less valuable for that, and, as discussed in the previous section,

arguably offer a more rounded snapshot on 'the public discourse' than that captured solely by the quantitative.

## European Crisis Discourses: the case of Germany

### Moritz Sommer

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The status-quo: Economic recovery, political silence and a widespread neglect of the on-going crisis

Assessing current crisis discourses in Germany is an odd endeavour. While in the hardest hit eurozone countries the German word is anxiously followed and more powerful than ever, in Germany itself the eurozone crisis is by now largely absent from the public agenda. This silence – spanning party politics to newspaper coverage, from social movement activism to daily conversations in the streets – is certainly the most remarkable feature when comparing the German discourse with those of other European countries at the present moment. At least two central dynamics help in understanding this paradoxical setting.

The first and perhaps most evident explanation is Germany's comparably good economic situation. While large parts of the eurozone are struggling with economic recession and harsh austerity measures, the economic situation in its largest creditor country is quite the opposite, with modest economic growth and – particularly important for the German psyche – a low unemployment rate of 6,9% (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2013; Instituts für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung 2013). Amongst the population, these trends seem to translate into moderate economic optimism. This is illustrated by the results of an annual survey which asks for the central sources of personal anxiety. Its latest issue finds that from 2010 to 2013 the shared fear of a worsening economic situation declined by 17%. Fear of increasing unemployment declined by more than 20% in that period and both have now been overtaken by a non-economic issue: the fear of natural catastrophes (R+V Versicherung 2013). Apart from sporadic immigration from the European south, the eurozone crisis has widely vanished from the German public imagination.

Adding to that is the specific configuration of the political debate which adherents of agonistic democratic theories would certainly call 'post-political' (Mouffe 2005). The national elections in September 2013 were a case in point: rather than on genuine political content – and hence, contentious debates and decisions – Chancellor Merkel's campaign focused on vague promises of continuity and stability. Nicknamed alternately 'teflon chancellor' for her lack of strong opinions as well as the

impression that her opponents' criticism never sticks and 'Mutti' (*mummy*) for her reassuring and motherly demeanour, her central slogan was nothing but a modest '*you know me*'. For her conservative party CDU (*Christlich Demokratische Union*), the complex, potentially controversial and therefore unpopular eurozone crisis was no election issue. Neither did the social democratic challengers (SPD or *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) stand much to gain by raising it: not only did the previously endorsed issue of Eurobonds prove to be unsuitable in mobilizing voters but, more importantly, the electorate was highly satisfied with Merkel's handling of the eurozone crisis. A poll in April 2013 showed that 70% of the population thought her crisis management was 'good' or 'rather good' (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2013). Moreover, in all major parliamentary decisions on the eurozone and the bailout-packages, the SPD had voted *with* the conservative-liberal coalition. Criticizing Merkel would have undermined its own credibility. For Streeck (2013), Merkel's vague dogma '*if the Euro fails, Europe fails*' has become the unquestioned national reason of state. In general terms, this broad unity has to be understood in view of a traditional pro-European consensus, an unofficial grand coalition with almost all major political parties agreeing on European issues (including the major parties CDU/CSU, SPD, the Greens and the liberal FDP). On European integration, there has never been much controversy nor any visible distinction between opposition and government and thus, its politicization at least in the political arena remains limited.

The absence of the issue during the 2013 election campaigns is in keeping both with the brisk manner in which Merkel mentioned the crisis in her 2014 New Year's address, and – above all – with the 'spooky absence' (Knauss 2013) of the eurozone crisis within the coalition treaty that has laid the ground for the new Grand Coalition (CDU/CSU & SPD 2013). In terms of its programme, the centrality of sound budgetary policies, debt reduction and fiscal retrenchment indicates policy continuity rather than factional dispute. This runs counter to *The Guardian's* hope that 'the SPD's involvement in the next German government could mean some easing of the austerity terms imposed across the eurozone' (The Guardian 2013). Instead, earlier SPD-backed incentives such as the aforementioned Eurobonds, a fiscal transaction tax, broad European spending schemes and fiscal solidarity measures were the first topics to be dropped during the coalition negotiations.

Beyond these dynamics at the level of the status quo, there are some further particularities of the German crisis discourse that are important to discuss.

### Eurosceptic challengers

In the sphere of party politics, some recent developments potentially jeopardize the broad consensus and the neglect of the eurozone crisis in current debates.

Founded by academics in 2013 as a single-issue anti-Euro party, the AfD (*Alternative for Germany*) just barely missed the 5% threshold in the 2013 elections. Their campaign predominantly focused on the dissolution of the eurozone and a return to the Deutsche Mark, a cutting back of supranational competences and a conservative critique of the bailout-packages for Greece. While the election results and current polls on the European elections (7,5%, INSA – Meinungstrend 2014) indicate that the AfD speaks to a considerable share of the electorate, the new party is ignored by the established players and its positions are infrequently reported in the quality press, not least due to the party's rhetorical flirts

and personal ties with the far-right. Scared to lose ground to this new and unusual right-wing challenge, the Bavarian CSU (the *Christlich-Soziale Union* is the CDU's sister party in Bavaria) has recently joined in condemning the alleged centralistic interference of the European bureaucracy (Der Spiegel 2014).

While the AfD mainly addresses right-of-centre eurosceptics, the democratic-socialist party DIE LINKE (*The Left*; 8,6% in 2013) offers a left-leaning interpretation of European integration which in the course of the crisis gradually became articulated in openly eurosceptic tones. Highly disputed within and beyond its party, in December 2013 the party executive presented a controversial motion for the coming European elections. In its later modified preamble the authors decried the EU as a 'neoliberal, militaristic and largely undemocratic power, jointly responsible for one of the largest crises in 100 years' and denounced its 'bureaucratic dictation' (Die Linke 2014).

### Earlier media attention and Greece-bashing

Discursive shifts and changing attention over time provide an additional perspective to the current assessment of the eurozone crisis discourse. Draghi's announcement of an unlimited bond-buying plan in September 2012 could qualify as a central trigger for the rather calm status-quo, but before that the picture was different, shaped by diffuse anxiety and a considerably higher degree of public awareness. This is certainly due to Merkel's inevitable adoption of a key role at the outbreak of the crisis and to her subsequent omnipresence in European publics. Her centrality also explains why the German crisis discourse is primarily a national one whereas in other eurozone countries the numerous references to German politicians produce a much more Europeanized debate (Kreisi and Grande 2014).

Particularly in the spring of 2010, and again in 2011, at the peaks of the Greek turmoil, bailout-negotiations and spectacular mass protests, the fear of Greek bankruptcy and its consequences for the German taxpayer were widespread. At that time, the eurozone crisis was mainly depicted as a *Greek* crisis and cultural finger-pointing right up to prejudiced Greece-bashing was common in the German tabloid and beyond ('*We pay the bills while others party shamelessly*', in Bild, Koch 2010). Stereotypes of the 'lazy', 'corrupt' and 'party-loving' Southern European were assigned to entire countries and set in opposition to the 'hard-working' and 'modest' German tax payer. The political discourse of Merkel and others accommodated these stereotypes, further fuelling a nationalistic excitement that opposed any further bailout and debt cuts, not to speak of a 'transfer union' or other long-term solidarity-based solutions of the crisis. It was common belief these measures would provide wrong incentives and moral hazards which would eventually make 'good' states liable for the self-inflicted debts of those 'bad' and 'irresponsible' ones. This already hints at the dominant crisis interpretation and suggested solutions in the German context.

### Common interpretations and solution strategies

In most general terms, the eurozone crisis is framed by both the media and political actors as a *state debt crisis* and as an accumulation of *national crises*. This implicates widely accepted explanations and solution strategies.

The dominant explanation refers to a combination of institutional and cultural failures at the national level condensed in the claim that the debtor countries lived irresponsibly beyond their means at the expense of the European community and specifically Germany as its top net-contributor. In this logic, the eurozone crisis is perceived as the logical result of systematic misconduct in the South that carries with it the assumption of national responsibility in dealing with these problems.

Framed in technocratic terms of systemic unavoidability, the disdainfully called PIGS (Portugal, Ireland and / or Italy, Greece, Spain) are compelled to do their 'homework', which in this case means to conduct rigid austerity measures and budgetary consolidation. Austerity is portrayed as the only logical and possible consequence both in politics and the public sphere. Among the right, the rigid saving plans are additionally framed in terms of a 'fair' compensation for years of 'fraudulent decadence'. The German proposal to establish a European 'budget overlord' (in German: '*Sparkommissar*') illustrates that any sort of financial aid is only accepted on condition of fiscal surveillance (Bollmann and Wehner, 2012). Moreover, between early 2010 and 2012 demands for an exclusion of highly indebted countries from the eurozone were widespread among conservative politicians (CDU finance minister Schäuble: '*Exclusion as ultima ratio*', in Handelsblatt 2010) and the tabloid (Bild (2012): '*Kick the Greeks out of the Euro*') but also among the population: in May 2012, 60% were in favour of an exclusion of Greece and only 31% against it. Eventually, the numbers went down to an evenly distributed 46% in November 2012 (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2013).

The distribution of roles in this scenario is clear-cut: on the one hand, the Greeks (Spaniards etc.) are to blame collectively. On the other hand, the German crisis management on European level is often pictured as a 'noble exercise' that demands gratitude and humbleness. The large austerity protests in Greece or Spain and criticism of the German influence are frequently labelled as unjust and ungrateful (Bild (2011): '*We pay – and yet they insult us*'). A hysterical media outcry about alleged '*Deutschen-Hass*' (hatred of Germans) in early 2012 illustrates this attitude. Many of these debates are characterized by an attitude of moral superiority. Moreover, German elites do not refrain from exerting direct pressure on the democratic decision making process in the affected countries: When in May 2012 a left government in Greece seemed possible, Berlin threatened to stop the financial support and rather bluntly, Schäuble asserted that '*the Greek people knows what is has to do*' (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2012). The crisis revealed a widespread distrust in popular sovereignty in which democratic participation is perceived as a threat to the functioning of the markets. In the German public, this relativization of the democratic principle has been discussed as 'market-compliant democracy', a neologism attributed to the chancellor.

Apart from academic discussions lead by Wolfgang Streeck, Jürgen Habermas and some of the few left-leaning economists outside of the economic orthodoxy (Bofinger, Habermas And Nida-Rümelin 2012; Streeck 2013), systemic interpretations focusing on the inherent imbalances of the eurozone, its design flaws and the consequent *joint* responsibility remain marginalized. Moreover, there is almost no discussion of the German contribution towards the financial instability in the eurozone. The involvement of German banks is dismissed and, most crucially, there is little critical awareness of the country's heavy emphasis on export-led growth and the government's strict rejection of everything that could threaten its trade surplus, such as an ending of the low national wage policy and an easing of the almost fetishized fight against inflation. These positions are paradigmatic for the dominance of

neo-classical economic thinking and the influence of the German ordo-liberal tradition in the public discussion Dullien and Guérot 2012).

### Concluding remarks

After a period of public attention and aggressive commentary at the heights of the crisis (when in fact the social impacts of the austerity measures were not yet fully visible), the former has disappeared from the national debate. Comparing the situation in Germany to those of other European countries, the current indifference is striking particularly within the sphere of politics. When we furthermore conceive of the eurozone crisis as a chance for a politicization of the European Union which would put its future back on the public agenda, we must admit that the political leaders of its largest member-state fail to offer anything close to a European vision. If nothing else, this lack becomes evident in the reluctant, ad-hoc crisis management of the German government. The Greece-bashing phase has demonstrated that without a broad and fundamental discussion about the substance and purpose of European integration, the probability of a national backlash is real. However, the broad consensus on austerity and the undisputed position of the chancellor and her finance minister indicate that the new coalition will continue a technocratic discourse one-dimensionally focused on sound macroeconomic policy and budgetary consolidation.

It remains to be seen whether the political elite acknowledges the 2014 European Parliament elections as a new opportunity to offer a positive European narrative and to enter into a substantial exchange with the German public. So far, however, lively EU-discussions remain limited to eurosceptic voices.

## European Crisis Discourses: the case of Greece

### Hara Kouki

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### Introduction

Following the outbreak of its sovereign debt crisis, Greece received its first international bailout in 2010 and the second in 2012, both of which were linked to major austerity measures such as spending cuts, tax hikes, structural reforms and privatisations. Much more than a mere economic crisis, this recession – the most severe ever experienced by an established democracy (Eurostat 2012) – has taken a horrendous toll on Greek society. The traditional party system has collapsed and the neo-Nazi far right grown rapidly in popularity, as the unemployment rate keeps climbing to new record highs. With a million or so unpaid workers, a growing number of people are at risk of poverty and social exclusion: homelessness has rocketed, while hunger and undernourishment fill the picture. This series of events has put Greece at the centre of global attention.

### Dominant Narrative

The way the Greek crisis has been perceived and represented in the national public sphere is an inherent part of the crisis itself. Since the outset, the dominant interpretation tells the story of a predictable crisis that was a long time coming, one that was to be expected from a country that never managed to modernise enough in spite of its European Union (EU) membership. Instead, what prevailed were the legacies of a backward political culture impregnated with clientelism and institutionalised corruption that can be traced back to the formation of the Greek nation-state (Triandafyllidou et al. 2013). Greek citizens and their political system are to blame, then, and the only way out of this deadlock is to at long last develop a rationalized labour and civic ethos, like the one dominant in other Western European countries, through the implementation of rigid fiscal policies imposed by international and European financial and political organs. This discourse attributing the

roots of the crisis to Greek culture has been disseminated systematically by international and national economic and political elites and mainstream media since the beginning of the crisis.<sup>8</sup> Its great impact on public opinion is also related to a deeply ingrained understanding of Greek history as the domination of a ‘traditional’ political culture (the so called ‘underdog’) over a ‘modern’ one (liberal reformist); this ‘underdog’ culture did not allow the country to overcome its structural ‘particularities’ and thus catch up with the modernized West.<sup>9</sup>

## Stages

Such assumptions pre-existed the crisis, but intensified during it. Before examining how this narrative developed over time, it is important to highlight the pivotal role played by the national mass media in this process. It is widely known that Greek media outlets are owned and controlled by big conglomerates, presenting powerful economic and business interests, who seek to gain profit, power or both, from their media activities.<sup>10</sup> According to the EU MEDIADIEM research project, ‘the country’s media policy remains highly centralized in the hands of the government of the day’ (MEDIADIEM 2011).

Until recently, the country of eleven million was home to a huge media sector of 11 television channels, 71 radio stations and more than 22 national newspapers. The financial crisis however shattered this media bubble: major outlets have shut down, at least 4,000 journalists have been laid off and others are facing big pay cuts (Al Jazeera 2012). According to a 2013 research, most citizens trust online news sources (39%) or television coverage (32%) and much less newspapers (9%) and radio programs (8%). What is astonishing, however, is that 91% of those questioned are convinced that media merely serve their owners’ interests (VPRC 2013). Faced with the events following the crisis, mainstream media magnates have been accused of allowing their own business interests influence editorial decisions to limit coverage to pro-EC, ECB and IMF agendas and to censor alternative opinions (Pleios 2013; Balezdrova 2011). Even before 2010, opinion polls testified to a legitimacy crisis that became all-encompassing during the crisis: Greek citizens do not trust the political elite and distrust the mass media even more (Vima Kyriakis 2012).

## Crisis as an opportunity (2010-2012)

In terms of politics, the two parties that, in turn, dominated government in the country for the past thirty years (PASOK, on the centre-left, and New Democracy, on the centre-right) and which form the coalition government that is currently in power, have since the outset of the crisis resorted to the argument that all levels of society are to blame. When accused of corruption, one veteran PASOK minister said ‘*Mazi ta fagame*’ (we all ate together) (Ekathimerini 2012), a slogan that implied that all Greeks were equally responsible for colluding in practices of patronage and petty corruption. The

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<sup>8</sup> See Prime Minister G. Papandreou’s Interview with Bruce Clark, *Economist* (2010).

<sup>9</sup> Shaped by theories of modernization, this interpretation has come to the fore since the outbreak of the crisis, see Diamandouros, N. (1994).

<sup>10</sup> For a map illustrating this see Smyrniaios, N. (2013) (in Greek). See also Grey, S. and Kyriakidou, D. (2012).

political system along with society as a whole had refused to rationalize, opting for the maintenance of pre-modern practices, such as free rider economic behaviour and lack of meritocracy. Under this scheme, public servants were the first to be disgraced by politicians and media sets (Mandravelis 2010). Greek citizens were pictured as young disobedient children who were refusing to grow up (Fourlis 2011), even when things had reached a deadlock; they were provided, thus, with the opportunity from above to reform themselves, through a painful process. According to research from Panteion University, the crisis was presented as a supernatural phenomenon, cast upon people, with economics as a natural process separate from politics– it was therefore irrelevant to think of causes or alternatives (Eleftherotypia 2010). Moreover, the public was presented daily with the negative ways in which Greece was being depicted in the foreign media<sup>11</sup> or the decisions that EU representatives were making about the country's future: official political discourse and media coverage confirmed and legitimized the dependency of the country on foreign actors. Nevertheless, at the beginning crisis was positively represented in the sense that it was an opportunity for the country to finally become modern, and conflictingly, to return to a 'business-as-usual' norm which had actually never existed in the country. Opinion polls debated the optimistic aspect of fiscal policies; articles referred to the 'best practices' that would enable the Greeks to become hard working, competitive and disciplined.<sup>12</sup>

#### Brief Interval: 2012 Elections

However, things changed quickly. The development of parallel national crises in Portugal, Ireland and Spain shifted the attention from the cultural particularities of the Greeks towards the systemic nature of the Europe-wide crisis. The revelations that other countries had debts unmasked to a certain extent the inconsistencies of the discourse – for instance, the impunity of many politicians accused of corruption. At the same time, it was becoming evident that the austerity measures were disastrous, not only for imposing increased and extra taxes, hammering incomes and generating poverty among the most unprivileged parts of society. It no longer required scientific or economic expertise to realize that adopting austerity policies would deliver recession, not growth. Internationally well-known economists, like Paul Krugman and Yanis Varoufakis, stated this publicly (Krugman 2012; Channel 4 News 2012), and intellectuals blamed European policies for shrinking the welfare state in order to rescue the banks (Douzinas 2012; Greek Left Review 2012). But during the build-up to the May 2012 elections, the political elites and the media launched a fierce campaign to purge the debate of alternative points of view and eliminate criticism of the memorandums. The discourse on crisis now become one of false dilemmas: Do Greek citizens wish to reject troika policies and live on food coupons? Will Greece remain a part of the European Union or become a third-world country? (Pretenteris 2012). Sticking with austerity was the only route to survival. Against this background of panic, however, the small non-communist leftwing party, Syriza, (which took 4.7% of the vote in the 2009 elections), won 27% of the vote and became the primary opposition. Criticizing the destructive neoliberal policies of austerity as imposed by the Troika and implemented by national

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<sup>11</sup>Extensive coverage followed the front cover of the German news magazine Focus that called the Greeks 'Cheats in the Euro Family' (Focus 2010).

<sup>12</sup> See lecture by Prof. Peter Economides 'Rebranding Greece', (2011) and its analysis in Mylonas and Kobatsiaris (2013).

authorities, Syriza faced a coalition government formed by PASOK, ND and the Democratic Left (DIMAR).

Crisis as there is no alternative

So while public opinion in Europe began to show more recognition of the disproportionate price Greeks had to pay, in Greece the hegemonic discourse became more aggressive and uniform. In this latter state, which is ongoing, and within the context of declining support for the political mainstream, austerity measures cannot be, and are no longer, presented as a positive opportunity. Instead, amid what is being described as a humanitarian crisis, deprivation and loss are simply the price that Greek citizens have to pay for their past. Citizens are told that ‘there is actually no other alternative’ and, as a result, the consequences of denying this solution are pictured as dramatic and chaotic: ‘we are at the brink of extinction, ‘there is no other way’, ‘harsh but necessary measures’. But misery cannot be ignored any longer: now there are media stories about suffering. An unemployed mother unable to feed her children or pictures of a pensioner looking for food in the garbage reflect the insecurity experienced at the individual level. However, as decisions are taken by experts, while collective reactions, such as strikes or protests, are stigmatized, each citizen is presented as responsible for himself/herself and should alone deal with unemployment, injustice, depression, anger and anxiety (Ekathimerini *op cit*). In parallel with this emphasis on individual choice is the stigmatization of alternative opinions and protest actions against governmental policies. Cases of state censorship or police violence against journalists have been well documented (Syllas 2013). Contentious activity is presented as part of the ‘underdog culture’ that impedes progress, as reflected in the spread of the theory of the two extremes, which is used to equate collective political protest against austerity with racist violence (Kasimatis 2013; Michas 2013); the pro-memorandum coalition government can no longer guarantee the wellbeing of Greek citizens, but at least provides them with a minimum of law and order. This version of the crisis discourse is capitalizing on people’s fear, insecurity and despair. In the ongoing emergency situation, the ‘Greek crisis’ repeatedly legitimizes the imposition of urgent policies and legislation that circumvent human, political and social rights.<sup>13</sup>

What proved to be crucial towards this development was the crisis that the media has undergone in the past two years (Al Jazeera *op cit*). As before, the media that survived remained in the hands of magnates directly connected to political and economic elites; what has changed is that media policy employs rigid news directives- as in the case of the environmental protests in the Skouries region that have been massively under reported (Trilling 2013). For years, the local population have objected to gold mining works as being environmentally destructive and attacked by the police, in a region where the media magnate Bobolas has business interests.

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance economic analyst B. Papadimitriou calling for a Golden Dawn-New Democracy coalition to secure the country’s salvation, published by e-observer.gr on September 12 2013, accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7UtKxpYdO4>

## Alternative Discourses

This hegemonic discourse (re)produces 'Greece' as a stable entity obscuring any differentiations. Anyone who attempts to articulate a point of view beyond the mainstream one finds themselves in a position of opposition. But people's experiences, fears and anxieties, their anger and their future in many cases cannot fit in a polarised discourse that permeates the public sphere. So the growing majority of people feel invisible within this representation of reality and excluded from the way their own life is being narrated and negotiated in domestic and international media or in what is perceived to be 'civil society'. As a result, the 'anti-memorandum' bloc hosts an increasing number of discourses on crisis, which are often contradictory. There are cases when self-castigation over the country's deficiencies becomes the other side of self-narcissism related to its unique historical heritage: the far right is on the rise. Increasingly, left wing *Syriza* is functioning as an umbrella for dissenting voices due to its steady defence of citizens' social and political rights. At the same time, in various towns around the country, citizens have created grassroots health centres, antifascist groups, solidarity networks, or alternative media platforms and work collectives. Even if they are never reported in the official media, such collective initiatives, by creating a parallel universe, challenge dominant representations of reality, the lack of alternatives, and the related feelings of failure and hopelessness. Considering mainstream media part of the problem, people are gradually turning towards alternative sources of information and social media networks that are not aligned with the government (*VPRC op cit*). Due to the reproduction of the narratives analyzed above, the mainstream media has lost any organic connection to the communities of people in the country, further deepening the chasm between the rulers and the ruled and, thus, the crisis.

## Conclusion

Crisis discourse in Greece, then, has been since the beginning a highly moral narrative based on notions of collective guilt, punishment, and the duty to suffer and sacrifice. What is running through is a culturalist understanding of reality (Mylonas 2012). What is a European, or even a global capitalist crisis has been translated as a crisis of a particular nation-state, of its particularities and weaknesses while leaving the structural roots of this recession intact. This is also related to hegemonic narratives in other European countries that based on national stereotypes explain the crisis while abstaining from reflecting politically on this. However, these kinds of interpretation of the crisis have played a pivotal role in reproducing the crisis and, to this extent, also reflect a failure of the European project.

## European Crisis Discourses: the case of Hungary

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The concept of perceived and real 'crisis' in Hungary can be broken down into three target areas: politics, economy and identity. These are the main hubs of crisis discourse as expressed in the media, by social movements and disseminated through political discourse. In Hungary there is a very strong sociopolitical bipolarity with distinct differences in how the crisis is perceived. There are divided perceptions over what, or who, is causing various 'crises'. This dichotomy is rooted in adversarial political polarization between the right, led by the conservative nationalist party Fidesz, and the liberal-left, made up of a loose coalition of opposition parties. This sociopolitical divide is subsequently embedded in how Hungarians view themselves within Hungary as well as within the wider European crisis discourse.

### Perceptions of Political Crisis

The political crisis in Hungary is one that remains highly divided between left and right. On the Right the concept of political crisis, propagated primarily by the Fidesz government and amplified by a loyal and multi-faceted media, solidifies the idea that Hungary is under attack from outside 'oppressing' forces. This sentiment is also echoed and amplified within more extremist rhetoric, led by radical right party Jobbik. These perceived oppressors are most often personified as foreign investors or the European Union (EU), increasingly since the start of the global economic crisis. However, skepticism, hesitance and concern over foreign 'forces' in Hungary is backed by a long history of oppressive foreign regimes and has been an underlying theme for the right since transition. The EU has become central in the current national crisis debate in Hungary, particularly since the 2010 national elections which saw a large shift to the right and radical right. Fidesz won 52.73%, giving them a two-thirds government majority, and Jobbik won 16.67%, making them the third largest party in parliament.

Internally the right and radical right have also targeted the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) as a continuation of communism threatening Hungary. Rhetoric from right and radical political figures and supporting media disseminates the idea that Hungary needs to 'fight' against these forces that are

impeding upon Hungarian sovereignty, values and culture<sup>14</sup> cultivating an image of Hungary as a continuously virtuous and strong country that has dealt with tyrannical outside forces throughout history. This crisis rhetoric has also paved the way for Fidesz to re-centralize Hungarian resources (oil and gas) and increase executive powers.<sup>15</sup> The purported preservation of Hungary's sovereignty and culture is also apparent in the new Hungarian Constitution instated by the Fidesz government in April 2012. The constitution brings back a religious, value-based nationalism, which has been a topic of scrutiny by the EU, USA, Amnesty International and Freedom House.<sup>16</sup>

Counter to this is the crisis narrative espoused by Hungarian liberal-left parties and supporters, which posits that the Fidesz government is undermining democratic Hungary. This perspective is disseminated by way of liberal and left wing media, politicians and grassroots social movements. In their narrative Fidesz's nationalist rhetoric and centralizing efforts are jeopardizing Hungary's democratic legitimacy, in turn corrupting the westernization process and liberal trends which had been advancing in Hungary over the last 25 years (HVG 2013). Liberal-left actors and supporters look for solutions to their crisis both outward, to international forces like the EU for help in stopping illiberal trends, as well as internally, to opposition movements and alternative parties such as Milla, Szolidaritás and Együtt 2014. Milla and Szolidaritás are both large-scale anti-government movements, founded in 2010 and 2011, which have mobilized upwards of a hundred thousand supporters into the streets for protests against Fidesz initiatives. In October 2012 the movement-party Együtt 2014 (Together 2014) was formed in an attempt to unite all opposition parties and movements for the 2014 elections.

However, despite this activism within Budapest-based movements, there is also a crisis of disillusionment and apathy among liberal and left wing individuals, as reflected in high levels of undecided voters in national polls and lower turn-out for liberal-left voters in the last elections. Disillusionment is working in parallel to a mass physical exodus from Hungary, largely thought to have increased since 2010 because of the perceived political crisis in Hungary.<sup>17</sup>

### Perceptions of Economic Crisis

Linked with the bipolarity discussed above, perceptions of the European economic crisis and Hungary's role within this crisis are also polarized. From a macro-level, international viewpoint Hungary is experiencing an upward economic turn, having recently paid off its IMF loans (Eder

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<sup>14</sup> With reference to the Fidesz government's characterization of the EU and foreign entities see Saltman, E. & Herman, L., (2013).

<sup>15</sup> For an extensive view of the Fidesz governments energy strategy refer to Ministry of National Development (2012). The Fidesz government explicitly discusses its aim to re-centralize the government's ownership and role in managing Hungary's energy outlets on page 7 in the introduction of the report.

<sup>16</sup> An English translation of the *Fundamental Law of Hungary* is provided on the Hungarian government's website: [http://www.kormany.hu/download/2/ab/30000/Alap\\_angol.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/2/ab/30000/Alap_angol.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> A total of 54,827 Hungarian citizens moved to Germany in 2012 alone. This was a 31% increase compared with 2011 Hungarian migration trends. These numbers come from the Federal Statistical Office of Germany as reported in Index (2013). Similar trends are seen in the UK: London is currently the fourth largest Hungarian city in the world.

2013). Economic easement is largely due to the Fidesz government's mandated reduction of household energy and gas prices and centralizing efforts with the Hungarian Central Bank.<sup>18</sup> Conservative, nationalist and more radical right supporters are mainly pleased with the direction Hungary has taken in centralizing its economic sector, through increasing government stakes in the national utilities industries and Central Bank (HVG 2011). The European economic crisis seems of less concern to most Hungarians. Media discourse and the aims of social movements focus primarily on internal national economic issues.

However, liberal-left actors, media and social movements express their fears around the inevitable medium and long-term effects of centralising measures, notably that the government has used 'unorthodox policies' in order to decrease the deficit, including nationalizing private pensions and increasing taxes on banks and certain industries that are run primarily by foreign investors (Feher and Fairclough 2013). This worry about the turn away from foreign investment is part of a polarized socio-economic crisis perception which, like the perception of political crisis, revolves around an implied question of whether or not citizens see Hungary continuing its westernization process or taking steps eastward. Liberal and left wing media express concern over economic ties being made with Eastern powers, such as Russia and China. Seminal of this Eastward turn, Hungary is in the process of negotiating a €10 billion loan from Russia that will finance the construction of Russian-made nuclear power plants in Hungary (Buckley and Eddy 2014). These moves are seen as jeopardizing continued development with the West.

Lastly, within current grassroots social movements and green party policy-making there is a small portion of Hungarians lobbying for socioeconomic revisionism, similar to Occupy and other subterranean political movements in the west. However, these groups are largely marginalized and Budapest-based with limited penetration into the mainstream. Interestingly, radical-right environmental policy propositions, put forth by Jobbik, espouse similar sustainable and green initiatives as an alternative to the current growth paradigm. The difference between the two alternative economic paradigms is that liberal-left grassroots social movements tend to take into consideration more European-wide and global solution views while the radical-right limits their scope to Hungary, with some limited cooperation within the Transdanubian region.

### A Crisis of Hungarian Identity

As a consequence of the highly bipolar perceptions of both political and economic crises in Hungary, bolstered by the increasingly nationalistic overtones of the Fidesz government, a greater emphasis has been placed on identity issues, reflecting the confusion around Hungary's place within Europe. Morality-based agendas have been instated directly into the Hungarian constitution: defining marriage and family along conservative lines (Art.L Sec.1) and identifying Hungary strongly as a Christian nation. Meanwhile, farther right wing and radical right publications and social networks increasingly discuss what it is to be a 'pure' or 'real Hungarian' (*igaz(i) Magyar*). Assisting in the defining of

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<sup>18</sup> The Hungarian government mandated an 11.1% reduction of household energy and natural gas prices, instated 1 November 2013. Lowering household costs is one of the main agendas for Fidesz in the lead up to the national elections set for April 2014. See Portfolio (2014).

oneself as a ‘true Hungarian’, the right and radical right have put to use a myriad of ancient national symbols as a means of cultivating identity. While some of these symbols, such as the national tri-color, have become monopolized by the right, other symbols lead to deeper and more controversial questions of identity.

Controversial identity symbols have become commonplace among radical right adherents, as well more hard-line nationalists. The red and white striped Árpád flag, previously used by Nazi-Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, is now commonplace at Jobbik, and even Fidesz, rallies.<sup>19</sup> The greater map of Hungary, showing the country’s pre-1920 Treaty of Trianon borders, has also returned en masse to the streets of Hungary, depicting the territory Hungary had redistributed after WWI.<sup>20</sup> These, and a number of other historically controversial symbols, can be found on t-shirts, bumper stickers, placards and tattoos. While they are used to show nationalist pride and unity they also distinctly imply who is *not* Hungarian according to these terms.

The mainstreaming of these symbols and the question of ‘Hungarianess’ has facilitated the rise of xenophobia in Hungary. Unlike many radical right parties and policies across Europe, which tend to target Muslim and Eastern European immigration, Hungarian xenophobia primarily targets internal perceived minorities, mainly the Jewish and Roma population. Jobbik has increasingly popularized the term ‘Gypsy Crime’ since 2009, and up to two-thirds of Hungarians now feel that criminality is ethnically linked to the Roma (Index 2009). Anti-Semitism has also been increasing with growing incidents of vandalism, graffiti and threats, to the point where noted Jewish author Ákos Kertész was recently granted official asylum in Canada indicating the escalating level of the problem (see Balogh 2013).

\* \* \*

These crisis narratives heightened in the lead up to the 2014 national elections, held 6 April 2014. Fidesz warned of the return of communist entities if the opposition gained power while the opposition warned of the continued undemocratic decline of Hungary if Fidesz remained in charge. Worries about how political shifts might change the economic driving forces are also crucial in crisis discourse in Hungary. Alongside politics and economy the deeper question of Hungarian identity, surfacing age-old tensions, defines the basis for friend and foe, true and false, Hungarian and other. Europe is intrinsically tied to both sides of Hungary’s bipolar crisis narratives taking form as foreign oppressor or democratic savior, economic imperialist or currency stabilizer, a symbol of Hungary’s future or an impediment on Hungary’s national potential. The resolution to the wider felt European crisis will have a profound impact on which narratives will win out and where Hungary’s future lies.

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<sup>19</sup> The Árpád flag is represented on the Hungarian coat of arms, however, the flag on its own is also symbolic of the Árpád family, founding the first kingship of Hungary. This flag first become controversial when it was used on the flag of the Arrow Cross Party in the 1940s. Fascistic versions of the flag use nine rather than eight striped (starting and ending in red).

<sup>20</sup> In 1920, after WWI, the Treaty of Trianon took away a large portion of Hungarian territory and citizenship, redistributing land to neighboring territories. The ‘Greater Map of Hungary’ is a symbolic representation not only of how great Hungary once was, but also a symbol of foreign oppressors taking Hungary’s power away.

## European Crisis Discourses: the case of Spain

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### Framing Europe: the history and media of Spain

The Spanish view of Europe and the European Union has changed dramatically since its 1986 entry following the fall of the Franco regime in 1975. At that point, accession to the EU was seen as a net benefit to aid an underdeveloped vestige of Western Europe's totalitarian legacy. Yet recent polling and media reports have shown that the economic crisis since 2007 has deeply transformed public opinion of the EU.

The past few months alone have seen popular mobilization in a defiant response to the conservative Rajoy government's law to ban and exact fines on unauthorized protests. Many of these movements have framed their opposition to particular aspects of domestic public policy within the fight against European austerity (El País 2014). Yet it is less clear how compelling the public and mainstream media find such a connection. Has the media's framing of Europe aligned with the view among activists that controversial domestic policies relate to European austerity prescriptions? One common phrase among activists on the Internet has entered the language of the news media and has come to the fore in describing Spain's challenge: *la estafa democrática*, or 'the democratic sham' (Barril 2013). What role is Europe seen to have played in this 'sham,' and to what extent has the media's framing affected or incorporated the public's views of Europe? Public opinion polling has shown a sharp decline in support for the European Union; this piece aims to understand the extent of media involvement in this transformation in opinion.

### Methodology and the divergent media landscape

This background paper undertakes a study of the Spanish press through an examination of recent articles from four major newspapers: the right-leaning *ABC*, left-leaning *El País*, the more neutral *El Mundo del Siglo XXI* and the Catalanian paper *El Periódico*. This methodological approach provides insight into the domestic view of Europe through its incorporation of journalistic anecdotes in the international news media as well as public opinion polling. Attention to different keywords or terms that appear in different kinds of stories focuses the study around key themes that appear in the public discourse. Polls aid in understanding general trends in public opinion, and a more thorough analysis of media reports contextualizes these statistics.

The difficulty of the crisis has polarized domestic responses even further, and this divergence appears in the news media. Compared to the centre-left or leftist papers, the centre-right *ABC* has differed, especially with reference to *civil society*. In one specific report on the online platform 'Transforma España,' the newspaper labels civil society as the rescuer of the country (Campelo 2012). Yet *ABC*'s

vision of civil society was created by the Fundación Everis to bring experts from the private, public and social sectors together to analyze the economic crisis and provide eight key action items for implementation. The platform's recommendations for a 'responsible welfare state' and 'efficient government' stand in stark contrast to the demands of mass protest movements filling the country's streets and plazas. The leftist newspapers report on civil society in relation to student boycotts or occupations, as well as the socialist opposition's characterizations of Rajoy policies (El País, *op cit*). While the two understandings of civil society are not mutually exclusive, they indicate a vast gap between notions of political participation. The business-friendly 'Transforma España' or the plazas filled with angry students demonstrate diverse efforts to bridge the divide between private and public life. Both involve greater numbers of the public in policy-making. Yet the divergence in these domestic responses to the national crisis also parallels their shared or differing perceptions of Europe's role in causing and responding to the economic turmoil.

### Public opinion analysis through polling

The Spanish public's deeply pessimistic view of the economy is evident in recent data from the Spanish Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). In its December 2013 Barometer, 86.9% of those surveyed view the general economic situation as 'bad' or 'very bad,' and 50.8% call it worse than the year before. The vast majority doubt the country will progress in the near term, with 69.7% stating the economic situation will remain the same or worsen within a year and 79.1% viewing the political situation similarly. The barometer demonstrates that the public clearly views unemployment as the main problem, with corruption and fraud considered the second largest issue. While this barometer does not refer explicitly to the crisis, other data have shown that it has deeply transformed public opinion of the EU.

In fact, recent polling shows a huge change in Spanish opinion between 2012 and 2013 alone. By March 2013, the share of opinion that 'European economic integration strengthened the country's economy' dipped by nine percent, from 46% in 2012 to 37% in 2013 (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 2013). According to the same data, the percentage of the Spanish population viewing the European Union favorably dipped even more sharply, from 60% down to 46%. Furthermore, 60% of Spaniards said they believe that economic integration has weakened their economy, and 52% of them held an unfavorable view of the EU. These shifts in opinion are even starker when data polled before the worst of the crisis, in 2007 and 2009, is taken into consideration. According to the Pew analysts, this change is directly related to frustration with the economic measures that Berlin, Brussels, and Northern Europe have 'pushed' on Madrid, and their perceived 'unfairness'. Polled on specific economic issues, 75% of Spaniards surveyed viewed the gap between the rich and the poor as a 'very big problem,' and 90% believed that such inequality has increased in the past five years. That said, 67% of those surveyed still wanted to keep the euro, with the Pew analysts claiming that public support for the Euro was higher in 2013 than 2012.

Perhaps most significantly, however, for the long-term outlook of the European Union, is a deep shift in youth support for the European Union. Favorability ratings among Spanish 18- to 29-year olds waned by 42%, from 88% in 2007 to 46% in 2013. According to Joaquín Prieto, an *El País* journalist writing in *The Guardian* in January 2012, 'The groups who trust the EU most are the better-educated

professionals, higher earners and young people. Distrust is highest among elderly people, those with less education, unemployed people, pensioners and those who have trouble paying their monthly bills.' It is important then to consider how youth opinions have changed so dramatically in the period between Prieto's 2012 article and the outcomes of the 2013 polling. Prieto notes the lack of information among many Spaniards, referring to a late 2009 CIS poll that found only 26% of those surveyed knew that Spain was a net receiver of EU funds. Another possibility relates to the entrenched problem of high unemployment as well as the public's skepticism demonstrated in the CIS poll. Youth unemployment is 55.06%, more than double the national unemployment rate of approximately 26% and leading many to reenter university or leave the country (Burgen 2014).

### Demonstrations of public opinion in the media

According to the BBC, Spanish approval of the EU has almost halved since 2007. One Andalusian man explained that 'we need help but all Chancellor Merkel does is tell our Prime Minister to cut our deficit and our pensions...I would cut the damn lot of those EU politicians – we did not elect them' (Kirby 2013). This media report attempts to tie both polling and anecdotal evidence to the more widely printed charge that Rajoy's government was elected in 2011 on a platform of austerity measures backed by European politicians. One recent article in *El País* claims that Rajoy ensures a 'continental resonance' in his messaging towards the EU and especially towards Germany, highlighting the prime minister's comment that he worries most that 'Germany is clear where we are going' (Moreno 2013). Regardless of the veracity of the charge that Rajoy's policies emanate from Brussels or Berlin, their outlets of publication merit consideration. The BBC represents external media attempts to analyze the political struggles within Spain. The centre-left newspaper, *El País*, refers to external involvement in Rajoy's austerity measures somewhat regularly, perhaps in an effort to consolidate support for the opposition.

Articles utilize the synecdoche of *Brussels* not only as a general representation of European Union policy, but instead as an indicator of a certain kind of cruel, austere policymaking that forces Madrid's hand. One recent opinion piece published in the Catalan paper *El Periódico* held 'the slowness of Brussels and its lack of democratic transparency' as the cause of disaffected voters in Spain (Urayen 2014). Another opinion noted that the German general elections in September 2013 would have far greater impact on the situation in Europe than the May 2014 elections for European Parliament (Torreblanca 2013).

However, distaste for Brussels and its correlated policy prescriptions have not resulted in the Spanish media's abandonment of Europe altogether. Articles before the brunt of the crisis hit Spain were sympathetic to European counterparts suffering from similar economic hardship (see Missé and Galindo 2009). On more than one recent occasion, the press has actively defended the EU, generally utilizing terms concerning its *community*, *project* or *mission*. A good example is found in a recent study conducted by the centre-left *El País* regarding the negative trend of increased political extremism among European Parliamentarians. Rather than castigate Europe as the cause of the issue, it focused on the growth in electoral support for this diverse fringe made up of nationalist far-right parties, anti-immigrant groups and *Europhobes* (Pérez 2014). Although the article consistently referred to extremism among parliamentarians in *Brussels*, it, in many ways, defended the EU from

attacks commonly employed among this fringe. The piece insisted that *the European project* is not swollen or selfish and, in one clarifying example, spends far less on bureaucratic wages than most German municipalities.

Nonetheless, there appears to be a split in interpretation of *Europe* in two distinct ways. The first relates to some nostalgia for the stability and development that European Union membership brought to Spain following the end of the Franco dictatorship, and this evokes a positive admiration for the organization even during these difficult times. The second immediately evokes Germany and the austerity measures that Merkel and seemingly far more powerful actors have forced into place in poorer countries like Spain. In one recent report, *El País* hypothesized an apparent generational divide which reflects this split: teachers have begun to make an effort to teach students not to blame Europe for the crisis, but the students insist that the negatives – German dominance, heavy reliance on cuts in social services, high unemployment – of European involvement outweigh the positives (Morini 2013). This analysis, however, is colored by the older, elite angle that drives the historically centre-left journalism of *El País*. In order to gauge the public discourse more broadly, it is worthwhile considering online media outlets or other forms of public expression that bypass the traditional political analyses centered around elites.

## Alternatives

There are potential alternative narratives beyond the elite-driven policy programs and arguments advanced in the press. The protests of the *indignados*, who filled Madrid's Puerta del Sol on 15 May 2011, demonstrated a deep-seeded frustration with formal politics. The activist arguments stood in opposition not only to austerity measures placed upon Spain under European and German insistence but also to the Spanish form of democracy more generally. Fatigue with corruption scandals only worsened the perception that democracy was eluding the Spanish public at a time when great economic strife necessitated a government engaged with civil society. More recently, 2014 has begun with a new virtual movement that is covering Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets with the color yellow, not in opposition specifically to the government or to Europe or to any single law, but to the entirety of the political system (Rubio 2014). There is a lack of faith in government in any of its political forms among the Spanish populace, yet civil society groups continue to turn out mass numbers of supporters as evidence of continued political vibrancy. While public opinion appears in journalistic polling and anecdotal research, it continues to demonstrate itself through civic engagement and political protest. Through recognition of this sphere as an alternative yet legitimate stream of public opinion, Spain and Europe can more holistically assess and determine their respective futures.

## European Crisis Discourses: the case of Italy

### Donata Secondo

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#### The Landscape of Public Opinion

There is a wide gap in Italy between the traditional media and public opinion. Because Italian newspapers have one of the lowest circulation rates in the EU (105 per 1000 inhabitants in 2001, compared to 300 in the UK) (European Commission 2004), there is little sense that they reflect or shape public opinion (Rocco 2013; Cuocolo 2013). Rather, newspapers are seen to closely reflect the agendas of specific political parties and their owners (Rocco 2013). News reports and political talk-shows enjoy some more influence on public opinion (Castigliani 2013), though these too are seen as deeply partisan. In particular, ex-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's private ownership of a large media conglomerate disillusioned most Italians of their expectations for an independent, impartial media. Rather, Italians embrace media "bias" according to their own preference, relying heavily on openly political sources of news and opinion, as can be seen in the comparatively high readership of opinion columns and viewership of political talk shows. Even the State television stations have clear political bents – Rai3 is perceived as left-leaning, while Rai1 is considered a mouthpiece for the government majority. Viewers on the right generally turn directly to private media, principally Berlusconi's Mediaset. This frustration – as well as a shift in television programming away from political content towards "reality" television and "infotainment" (Freccero 2010) – discourages public engagement with politics. A 2012 Censis popular opinion study suggests Italians perceive each other to be poorly informed and disinterested in politics (Censis 2012).

In this context, Italian public opinion is better located outside the traditional media. The internet is becoming an increasingly important source of news and opinion for Italians, especially among adherents of the M5S and the left (Censis 2013). The popularity of political satirists such as comedian-turned-M5S movement leader Beppe Grillo and comedian Maurizio Crozza reflect a public frustration with traditional news-sources and the political establishment they support. Cinema has long been Italy's most self-reflective art form, and recent films such as 2011's *Reality* and 2013's Oscar nominated *La Grande Bellezza* have evocatively captured Italy's public angst and self-perceived decline. Public opinion polls, conducted by both publically and privately funded research institutions, are also often used as key indicators of public sentiment.

#### Emerging Currents

Recent popular movements in Italy reveal currents of public opinion previously absent from the mainstream media, which were only hinted at in the low political trust data of public opinion surveys. Though belonging on different positions of the political spectrum and focusing in different issues, these movements have articulated the popular frustration with the political establishment - and with

Italian society more generally – for the national media, drawing attention to attitudes that were previously only privately expressed.

The No-TAV movement has since the 1990s been organizing against the construction of a high-speed rail service from Turin to Lyon through the Susa Valley in Piedmont, and gained national and international attention after clashes with police and the army in 2011. What started as an effort to prevent environmental devastation and as protest against wasteful spending has taken on a larger symbolic significance as a movement against the self-serving behavior of the political and economic elite, and has been a megaphone for the dispersed voices of anti-neoliberal, anti-austerity currents of the Italian left (InfoAut 2013).

The *Movimento dei Forconi* (“Pitchfork Movement”), a movement of mostly middle class, middle age small business owners and small farmers, burst onto the national scene with small but very visible protests in late 2013. This anti-establishment, nationalist and populist movement expresses a frustration with the “hypocrisy” of the “do-nothing” political class, that has allowed the economic gains made by ordinary Italians in past decades to crumble (Ipost 2014). While purportedly “apolitical,” the movement’s right-leaning undertones have attracted the attention of the more extreme right-wing parties in Italy, including the neo-fascist Forza Nuova party and the neo-Nazi Casa Pound movement (StrugglesinItaly 2013; Ipost 2012). While the movement has stalled in the winter of 2014, its short, intense burst of activity helped to further a political discussion about the incongruence between the political interests of Italian people and their perception of those of the political class. A survey conducted by Demos for the left-leaning Ballaró talk show found that 8 in 10 Italians agreed with the Forconi’s objectives (Diamanti 2013b).

Perhaps the most visible expression of this Italian frustration with traditional politics is the Movimento 5 Stelle (5 Star Movement, M5S). Similar to the *Forconi* movement in its populism and rejection of the political class, the M5S is anti-corruption, environmentalist, and participatory. Though it refuses to be pigeon-holed by the political spectrum, the M5S is thus somewhat more left-leaning than the *Forconi* – despite breaking with the Italian left in its Euroskepticism (Movimento 5 Stelle 2013). After a swift electoral rise in 2010-12, the M5S garnered 25% of the vote in the 2013 parliamentary election, in part thanks to young Italians eager for an opportunity to cast a protest vote against the entrenched parties. The M5S is in a unique position to voice the dissatisfaction captured in public opinion surveys and communicated by other social movements in parliament.

#### An “Anthropological Crisis” (Censis 2011)

Censis’s study ‘Retrenchment in the Present’ captures a prevailing sentiment in Italy that the nation is both in perpetual stagnation and, simultaneously, in perpetual decline. “Our society is seated, and has no big hope for the future, rather it fears the future and reacts with anger and rancor towards politics” (Censis 2013).

Italians across the demographic spectrum feel this anxiety. Young Italians no longer see education as a valuable investment, and are the least likely in Europe to aspire to start their own businesses (27.1%, compared to a European average of 42.8%, 74.3% in Bulgaria, and 40.3% in the UK) (*ibid*). Older

generations are self critical: in a Censis study, 13.3% of 50+ year olds said Italy struggles to keep up with other developed nations and 8.5% believed the country is in decline. 3.4% agreed that “we are an ignorant and presumptuous people,” while a surprising 16.2% agreed that “Italians think they are smart, but they let themselves be swindled/tricked by politicians”.

Political analysts point out that some of this pessimism can be attributed to a wider global angst in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (Mastrobuoni 2013). In Italy, however, these tensions are more longstanding, and have repercussions throughout the political process. As Lucia Anunziata, director of HuffingtonPost Italy says: “In our collective imagination – and not just that of the left – the past has become a fixed golden age, with respect to which everything else is a single, long road of decline” (Anunziata 2013).

### Dissatisfaction with Domestic and European Politics

Across the political and economic spectrum, many Italians are disillusioned with the political process and the political elite. Politicians are seen as corrupt and self-interested: 77% of Italians consider their elected official “mediocre,” and 87% of Italians have “no” or “very low” faith in their politicians. Only 8% believe that politicians advance in their careers through their merit, while 77% believe “recommendation” and “favoritism” are responsible. (Censis 2013).

Political engagement is down as a result: the 2013 elections faced 27.8% absenteeism, the highest in the republic’s history. Italians are less engaged in the political process than their European neighbors – 56% of Italians do not participate in letter writing, petitioning, political debates or other activities, compared to a European average of 42% and only 28% non-participation in France (*ibid*).

This national political landscape fits well with LSE political scientist Besir Ceka’s findings that trust in individual national governments tends to mirror trust in the European Union (Ceka 2013). Though Italy was once the most pro-EU nation in Europe (Diamanti 2013a), Eurobarometer data now show that it too is affected by the EU-wide trend of declining EU support. An IPSO-ACRI study notes the recent and precipitous nature of this decline: 40% of Italians have less trust in the EU in 2013 than in the previous year, and “EU trust” fell from 49% in 2010 to just 33% in 2013. (*ibid*). Nevertheless, Italians demonstrate resolve in continuing the European project: despite their flailing trust in the EU, 57% still believe the Euro will “prove an advantage for Italians within 20 years” (cited in Magri Dec 2013). Italians remain more optimistic than their neighbors, with Spain ranked the most euro-skeptical nation and France the most pessimistic about the future (Mastrobuoni 2013).

Italy’s historic leadership in the construction of the EU and the Euro is a source of great pride for Italians who engage with the European project. Italy’s political struggle in the Eurocrisis, however, challenged this self-perception of leadership: Italians are begrudgingly starting to recognize the weakness with which they entered the Euro, and to see themselves not as leaders, but as subjects (Censis 2013). German leadership is strongly resented and resisted (Fubini 2013). Nonetheless, Italy’s ability to weather the worst period of the crisis without a European or IMF bailout fuels a continued pride and sense of economic and political superiority over other struggling European economies (Monti 2014).

## Public Opinion on Europe: A Matter of Identity

Despite Italy's central role in the construction of the EU and a continued high national support for the European project, public opinion on Europe is not homogenous, but rather deeply divided along identity lines.

### Party Affiliation

Though few Italian parties run on overtly pro or contra-EU platforms, support for the EU – and more fundamentally, European identity - run deeply on party lines. A University of Siena public opinion survey for the Institute of Foreign Affairs found that 75% of center-left voters reported feeling a mixed Italian and European identity, compared to only 60% of center-right voters and supporters of the M5S (University di Siena).

This party division may in part be explained by the important role prominent leaders of the Italian center left, such as Romano Prodi and Altiero Spinelli, have played in constructing Europe. As Euro-skepticism grows, politicians on the right have sought to exploit the public “myth” of the EU being a leftist endeavor for their political gain, obscuring the spectrum-wide support the EU and the Euro have traditionally enjoyed in Italy (Travaglio Dec 27 2013).

	Percentage that agree with the statement, by political affiliation			
	Movimento 5 Stelle	Center-Right	Center	Center-Left
"The Euro is the real source of our social and economic problems"	58%	55,5%	28%	30,5
"Italy would be stronger if it left the EU and returned to the Lira"	27%	37%	11%	9%
"Italy is a hostage to the Strong Countries (especially Germany)"	81%	84%	75%	71%

Source: Censis 2013. Translated by Donata Secondo

### Region

A study conducted by IPSO -ACRI found that Italians living in the South and in the island regions are unhappier with the Euro and less optimistic for its future than Northern Italians (cited in Magri Dec 11 2013). Given Italy's historical patterns of regional development, this geographical divide follows neatly from EU opinion divided along class lines.

### Class

As can be inferred from the regional division of European identity, public engagement with Europe is very divided along class lines, with wealthier Italians taking a more active engagement with the concept and politics of Europe (in the positive or negative), while poorer Italians are less likely to do so. Wealthier Italians, more informed on politics in general, are more informed on European politics and have a stronger European consciousness. Working class Italians, on the whole less politically informed, are most likely to only see "Europe" as a distant, bureaucratic force, which either does nothing (good), impedes national politics, or is seen to be vaguely responsible for a negative impact on their lives.

### Age

Studies have found that middle-aged Italians are less pro-Europe than their parents and children (Universita di Siena 2013). While older Italians may continue to feel pride in the creation of Europe and younger Italians may hold out hope for Europe's future promise, the middle-aged are stuck in the middle – having seen their parent's hopes fall short, but not expecting major improvements within their lifetimes. This could explain the predominance of middle age participants in anti-EU populist movements such as the *Movimento dei Forconi*. Youth support for the EU is particularly surprising given the shared European problem of high youth unemployment. Despite the commonality of the issue, youth unemployment is discussed as an Italian, rather than European, problem – more closely tied to national labor protection policies and political pandering to older taxpayers than to the

Eurocrisis or EU-wide dynamics. Nonetheless, young Italians are increasingly forced to look elsewhere in the EU for professional opportunities.

2013 has seen the largest shakeup of Italian politics in recent years, with Berlusconi's expulsion from parliament after two decades in government, the continued growth of the M5S party and other populist movements and the meteoric rise of the Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. As these new actors work to prove themselves in the eyes of the Italian public, we will see how the moment's air of change will affect the climate of political stagnation Italians have experienced in recent decades.

## European Crisis Discourses: the case of Belgium

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Belgium is neither perceived as a major player in the Euro Crisis, like Germany or France, nor is it a notable ‘victim’ of austerity like Italy, Spain, or Greece. However, it is not just the European Union’s (EU) presence in Brussels that makes Belgium an interesting case, though the fact that Belgium’s capital is the EU’s political centre does beg some reflection; it is Belgium’s unique nature, being a country comprised of two nations, each with its own network of international connections and relations, that makes it an interesting case study on public discourse in Europe.

For this case study, major Belgian newspapers were searched for key themes and content related to the Euro Crisis.<sup>21</sup> Searches were carried out on the websites for the right-leaning *La Libre*, left-leaning *Le Soir*, and financial daily *L’Echo*. Preliminary searches included the word ‘crisis’ by itself, and then added ‘euro’. Following these wider searches, search dates were constrained, using the same words, to dates of relevance to the Euro crisis in general, and to Belgium specifically. Many different dates were included in this search, two examples include restricting the search to the week prior to and following Mario Monti’s appointment as Italian Prime Minister, and the week prior to and following the formation of Elio Di Rupo’s government in Belgium.

Using these dates of interest, leaders names were also added to the search. Thus, during Cyprus’ banking crisis in March and April 2013, the term ‘Merkel’ was searched to attempt and gain perspective on the Belgian media’s perspective on her role. When various countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, United Kingdom) were placed alongside ‘crisis’, the United Kingdom had more than every other country combined in the right wing *La Libre*, while France achieved the same distinction in left-leaning *Le Soir*. When leaders’ names (Cameron, Merkel, Sarkozy, Hollande) were placed alongside ‘crisis’, Sarkozy ranked number one in every newspaper, followed by Merkel and Hollande, and very little mention of Cameron. This is understandable, and even expected, from Belgium’s Francophone news sources.

The terminology itself is also instructive. Terms used to describe Belgium and the Belgian economy broadly match those used to describe Germany, France, and the Netherlands. These four countries (sometimes expanded to include Luxembourg, Austria and at times the United Kingdom) appear with terms like ‘growth’ ‘power’ ‘expectation’ ‘strength’ (and Germany is more than once referred to as Europe’s ‘locomotive’). The terms used to describe Italy, Greece, and Spain, however, often made

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<sup>21</sup> The major popular newspaper, *Metro*, which produces both French and Dutch-speaking editions is unsearchable and only maintains issues for two weeks. Spending time working through its discourse would offer a separate, more populist take on issues of salience in Belgium.

reference to geographical location ('southern nations') or more overtly to their economic woes. Greeks and the Spanish are often presented as making 'sacrifices', or reference is made to their particular 'weaknesses', terms that rarely appear in articles on Belgium or Belgium's neighbours.

Further to searching the news media in this way, informal interviews were held with both French and Dutch-speaking Belgians. These helped tease out the narratives appearing in the media, showing which were important outside the media and which were not. For example, in interviews any discussion of the larger crisis rarely sparked emotion, and balanced opinions were usually expressed. However, discussion of Belgium's internal affairs often resulted in strong emotion and very pointed language ('anyone who thinks Belgium should be split up should have their citizenship taken away' as one example), with opinions being highly solidified. This reflects the impact of Belgium's recent political crisis on popular discourse, and how it overshadows the European economic crisis in many ways.

Finally, a cursory search for opinion polls yielded little information on the economic crisis or Europe in general. The opinion polls that were found centred on political issues (polls in 2014 are still asking questions about breaking Belgium into multiple countries). Once again, this reflects the political crisis' profound impact on Belgian discourse. A short discussion of the results presented in this section follows.

Three major elements inform Belgian discourse. The first surrounds divisions, how Belgians internalise the differences between Northern Europe and Southern Europe and how this divide manifests itself. The second division separates the nation and Europe. The Belgian media tend to see the nation as a fairly enclosed entity, with little relationship to Europe at large. This relates heavily to the third division, that between north and south in Belgium, between Flanders and Wallonia. The Belgian political crisis of the years leading up to the formation of Elio di Rupo's government in 2011 largely influenced how Belgians view and respond to broader European dialogue.

There is no attempt within the media to cast Belgium as a country as big or influential as Germany or the United Kingdom, nor does any such belief hold among the population. Rather, the discourse generally infers that Belgium fits into a group of countries in the north that are on a separate trajectory to those in the south. Belgium is frequently compared to its neighbours. Within the press, this grouping is normally used to distinguish between those countries seen as recovering well from the crisis (which include Belgium) and those seen as faltering, still requiring extensive external financial support (Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, and at times Ireland). This division appears in articles specifically reporting on Belgium's own economic position as well as articles on the wider European situation, so the grouping does seem to be the media's way of contextualising Europe as a whole, or at least Belgium's place within Europe.

However, larger states like France or Germany are not necessarily presented as having a large impact on Belgium. Articles on Belgium itself tend to mention other countries only to provide reference points. Whether this is due to a sense of self-awareness, the knowledge that Belgium is a smaller country with a fairly self-contained economy and a very unique political system, or whether this reflects the Belgian distinction between the national and the European (which does influence discourse

to a large extent), it is difficult to say. The media does reference other countries' impact on Europe in general, and (less often) on Belgium in particular, but such references are limited. External focus in both the media and in popular discourse tends to centre specifically on France, to a greater extent than Belgium's eastern neighbour Germany. Mentions of Hollande and Sarkozy appear far more frequently than those for Merkel in every major Francophone Belgian publication. Similarly, when the issue of France is raised in conversation, opinions seem readily available and often strong, while mentions of Germany illicit little to no emotion. On this issue, it would be interesting to explore the Dutch-speaking media's interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

Belgium's internal divisions also impact their relationship with Europe. Belgium is a country of two nations, Flanders and Wallonia (Brussels is a separate entity), both with differing histories and allegiances. The stark divisions between the two have heavily impacted Belgium's recent history, and could to some extent explain the Belgian media's focus on how other countries impact each other rather than how Belgium fits in to the system as a whole. Between the 2007 federal elections and the formation of the Elio Di Rupo-led coalition government in late 2011, political crises abounded surrounding the nature of the union between the two nations. In the midst of this crisis, which saw several attempts at negotiating government formation, several governments rose and fell. There was also discussion on Flanders potentially leaving Belgium. Anecdotally, some MPs brought up the possibility of simply dissolving Belgium and letting France, the Netherlands, and Germany claim the respective areas, leaving Brussels as an autonomous "European" capital city. Such a possibility is also mentioned in both *La Libre* and *Le Soir*, and even appears in international news sources like the United Kingdom's *The Telegraph* and the French daily *Libération*.

Exactly what impact this political crisis has had on Belgium's view of the European economic crisis is difficult to ascertain, as the two crises so rarely interact in discourse. However, that it has had an impact is evident. Results for searches placing 'Belgium' and 'Crisis' together outnumber the same searches when 'Euro' or 'Europe' is added by a rate of four-to-one in *La Libre* and *Le Soir*, and two-to-one in the financial journal *L'Echo*. This could also explain the clear separation between Europe and Belgium in terms of where blame is placed for various problems. With a political crisis occurring in Belgium, the economic crisis takes on a different, separate face. Often, it seems this face is removed from day-to-day life in Belgium, and responsibility both for causing the crisis and fixing it is placed on the shoulders of an unnamed 'other'.

The clear distinction in Belgian discourse between the national and the European leads to a general mindset that each country in the eurozone is mostly responsible for its own problems. That these countries' economic woes have impacted Europe on a wider scale seems somewhat missing from the discourse, but this is explained when looking at the media's view of internal affairs, as this mindset extends to Belgium itself. Belgian newspapers on the whole seem to agree that any problems Belgium has faced are Belgium's responsibility, explained to a certain extent by impact of the political crisis. Belgium's economic recovery is due to Belgian policy, not to any external help (of which Belgium has

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<sup>22</sup> A French speaker carried out this research. Though interviews with Dutch speakers took place (in English), an in depth look at Dutch-language media did not. It would be interesting to compare Dutch-language media with French-language media to gain a wider perspective on Belgian perceptions.

had comparatively little). Thus, when approaching an issue such as large-scale bailouts, Belgian media has seemingly little to say aside from noting that the countries receiving the bailouts should look to their policy to fix their problems.

The issue of bailouts itself lacks a great amount of salience in the Belgian media and population. The topic tends to elicit little emotion from Belgians who, as mentioned above, seem to view such subjects as belonging to the ‘other’, not to Belgium, and would prefer discussing issues they find of greater relevance to their day-to-day lives. Rarely, there will be some mention of frustration that Germany is able to use Belgian money in bailing out ‘failing’ nations. However, this is rare as German money has assisted Belgium as well (though to a much lesser extent than southern European countries), and Belgians seem to conceive of the bailouts as being German-funded and thus of little concern. In the media, bailouts are approached as a fact of life, a tool being used to stabilize poorer, less fortunate countries. This is borne out by the lack of opinion pieces on the bailouts in the two major Francophone papers, and no real ‘anti-bailout’ community in evidence.

That being said, protest culture is strong in Belgium. It is perhaps easiest to think of the protests that take place in Brussels based on their origins. The first group originates with trade unions. Trade union membership stands at roughly 50%<sup>23</sup>, and their presence is made known through protests. These protests largely focus on internal dynamics such as anger at low wages, and are directed towards the Belgian government. The second category comes from large transnational actors and advocacy groups who direct their protests at the EU. The discourse surrounding these generally focuses on trans-European dynamics such as the perceived imposition of austerity from above. The culprit here is often Germany, and the demonstrators themselves appear to be largely international. However, no raw data exist to show the actual numbers of protesters from inside of or outside of Belgium. Finding these numbers could provide an interesting line of inquiry in researching Belgium’s relationship with the EU.

The final area of interest in Francophone Belgium centres on the international media and their influence on popular opinion. Many Francophone Belgians take their news from French media. The impact of the French media in Belgium on Belgian perceptions and views might be an interesting line of inquiry.

Despite its smaller size, Belgium’s place as home of the EU’s capital and its recent political history offer interesting perspectives on the opinions surrounding Europe, the crisis, and how these opinions form. The item of greatest interest likely lies in the reasons why Belgium separates so distinctly the nation and Europe. Belgium’s story is one of divisions: Divisions between north and south reflect how Belgians see Europe as a whole, divisions between nation and EU impact Belgians’ experience with the supranational, and recent internal divisions change the levels to which Belgians engage the broader discourse. These issues are one road map for further analysis.

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<sup>23</sup> Information from <http://www.uva-aias.net/207>

# Euro Crisis in the Press: The Politics of Public Discourse in Europe

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While the sovereign debt crisis can now plausibly be said to have receded, the results of the 2014 European elections demonstrate that the euro crisis, in its broader sense of being both a crisis of legitimacy and purpose of the European project, persists. Since early 2013, LSE's *Euro Crisis in the Press* blog site has been exploring the politics of public discourse around the crisis as played out in the media and beyond, with 140 contributions to date from academics, journalists, NGO activists, policymakers, and artists.<sup>24</sup> It has gained a wide readership and hosted an expanding conversation, carried on in lively below-the-line discussions and amongst its 2,436 twitter followers. Its aim has been to provide a platform for highlighting and reflecting upon the different understandings and representations of the crisis that have underpinned much media reporting and public discourses across EU member states and beyond, ahead of an in-depth research project currently at the pilot stage and scheduled to begin in summer 2014.

In serving as a platform for debate, the site allows for a non-representative but fascinating mapping of crisis discourses. Luuk van Middelaar, a recent contributor (21/05/2014)<sup>25</sup> and speechwriter to the outgoing President of the European Council, identifies in his book *The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union* three basic discourses that tend to underpin analyses of Europe (2014: 2-4). Middelaar terms these 'the Europe of States', a project of cooperation between national governments; 'the Europe of Citizens', a federalist vision of a unified political entity; and 'the Europe of Offices', a more technocratic perspective in which rational bureaucracy prevails. While it is easy to identify each of these discourses and related understandings of the crisis, its causes and solutions, within contributions to the site, as well as more broadly within the European political mainstream and the key loci of European governance, the 2014 European elections also demonstrate the power of a purely oppositionist discourse, in which an amorphous, inchoate notion of Europe and a pervasive sense of crisis are mutually constitutive.

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<sup>24</sup> The Editorial and Research Team is composed of lead investigator Max Hänska (University of Gothenburg), Outi Keranen (UCL), Maria Kyriakidou (University of East Anglia), Jose Javier Olivas (LSE), Roberto Orsi (University of Tokyo), Vassilios Paipais (University of St Andrews), Monica Poletti (LSE/University of Milan) and Henry Radice (LSE).

<sup>25</sup> All dates refer to the date of publication on <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/>.

Problematically, even the ‘Europe of Citizens’ tends to be articulated not by the putative citizens themselves, but rather by elites. Regardless of the populist insurgencies of negativist outfits like the Front National or UKIP, there is a disconnect between those three conventional ways of articulating a positive vision of Europe as a political project with something to offer in the context of the ongoing, mutating euro crisis, and the emergent activisms, initiatives and perspectives charted in *The ‘Bubbling Up’ of Subterranean Politics in Europe* (Kaldor and Selchow 2012).

Unsurprisingly, then, the multiplicity of modes of discourse around Europe produces a plethora of understandings of what the crisis might mean. From Brussels, the technical, economic dimensions often seem to prevail, yet most of the most-read and commented-on posts tackle national issues. The site’s content bears witness to the crisis’ vernacularisation, and lends credence to Francisco Seoane Pérez’s assessment of the limits of a European public sphere (27/11/2013). For instance, Roberto Orsi’s gloomy diagnoses of Italy’s crisis, in which terminal decline stalks the nation, have gained significant traction (23/04/2013; 18/06/2013; 08/10/2013). Vassilios Paipais discusses political opportunism and the rise of extremism in Greece (23/10/2013). The debate around Catalan independence has also flourished, illustrating the way in which a focus on the euro crisis easily becomes captured and transformed into much more local-level political contestations around notions of identity and fairness (Mireia Borrell-Porta, 18/10/2013; Víctor Andrés Maldonado, 08/11/2013; Jose Javier Olivas, 30/09/2013, Marcus Pučnik, 11/03/2014; Sonia Sierra and Jose Javier Olivas, 06/12/2013; Sonia Sierra and Mercè Vilarrubias, 22/04/2014). Meanwhile, Max Hänska charts the “politics of blame” that has characterised much crisis discourse (22/03/2013).

In turn, the different understandings of the crisis in Europe contribute to a deeper crisis about the idea of Europe, a malaise about its vocation within our political imaginaries and its future as a global actor. For Heikki Patomäki, the “project of European integration is not reducible to political economy” (15/08/2013). Emilio Ontiveros notes that: “The very idea of European Union is being questioned” (23/07/2013). Similarly George Pagoulatos identifies “an existential challenge for Europe” (21/10/2013), though the virtues of “muddling through” have also been emphasised (Henry Radice, 24/03/2013). This broader challenge to Europe’s purpose and identity has been brought home by the intricacies of the Ukrainian crisis (Mary Kaldor, 27/05/2014; Ellie Knott, 05/03/2014 and 27/03/2014; Luuk van Middelaar, 21/05/2014; Roberto Orsi, 12/05/2014; Kevork Oskanian, 28/02/2014).

Media systems as a backdrop for the production and contestation of discourses around the crisis have also featured heavily during the lifetime of the project. The shutdown of Greek public broadcaster ERT was immediately analysed by Maria Kyriakidou (15/06/2013) and Giannis Manolis (14/06/2013). In an incendiary piece, Yiannis Baboulias argues that dominant, partial narratives prevail in Greek media to such an extent that contesting them necessitates the abandonment of traditional concepts of balance and impartiality (23/08/2013). Elsewhere, Sophie Lecheler assesses the risk to investigative journalism of a shrinking Brussels press corps (19/11/2013), while Outi Keranen suggests that: “Transparency and access to information in crisis-ridden Europe have become sparse currency” (31/05/2013).

As media, and mediators of discourse more broadly, come into focus, the frames that orient and circumscribe crisis discourses emerge (Christos Kostopoulos, 20/12/2013; Maria Kyriakidou and Jose

Javier Olivas, [24/01/2014](#)). Dominant frames have been unpicked and contested, bringing out important and often neglected topics, such as the gender dimensions of the crisis (Catherine Briddick, [19/03/2014](#); Ania Plomien and Diane Perrons, [17/09/2013](#)), and revealing omitted discourses that nevertheless go to the heart of its social consequences. Biases towards unproductive discursive ruts and false dichotomies have also been challenged. Afzal Siddiqui and Max Hänska, for instance, articulate a more positive discourse around possibilities for recovery in setting out an agenda for a European energy transition ([01/05/2013](#)). On an even more ambitious scale, Mary Kaldor attempts to change the whole framing of the debate in pointing the way to a more substantive democratic future for and within Europe in her response to the 2014 elections ([27/05/2014](#)).

Visual representations of crisis have played their part too, whether in the form of a series of arresting images of unfinished construction projects (Patrick van Dam, [17/03/2014](#)), via the medium of political cartoons (Tjeerd Royaards, [23/03/2014](#)) or video (Lila Caballero, [07/05/2014](#)). It must be said though, that in presenting a diverse range of perspectives and methodologies for articulating and mapping crisis discourses, the site has not yet fully come to grips with the challenge of going beyond the views of ‘experts’ and representing the potentially more abrasive perspectives of ordinary citizens who may or may not be preoccupied by Europe, many of whom have expressed their disaffection in the recent elections.

Nevertheless, the raucous cacophony of voices that has brought the site to life for over a year, and that shows little sign of falling silent, is testament to the diversity of ways in which the euro crisis continues to evolve, mutate and become intertwined with existing points of political and social tension across the Union. The discourses of Europe’s crisis are inseparable from crisis discourses within Europe, suggesting a worthwhile, if daunting, path to repairing Europe’s fractured political conversation.

## European Crisis Discourse: Themes

### Introduction - Trans-European Data

In addition to the work being carried out by the LSE Euro Crisis in the Press team (see p.39), there are a number of large-scale trans-European research projects being carried out that examine aspects of the way in which the current crisis is reflected in the ‘public discourse’. Other than public opinion surveys such as the Eurobarometer (2014a and 2014b), quantitative research is available from studies that attempt to locate this discourse, or ‘debate’, in the media. This section refers particularly to data from The Reuters Institute project, ‘The Euro Crisis, Media Coverage and Perceptions of Europe within the EU (see p.44 for further details), and from the work of Edgar Grande and Hanspeter Kriesi (see p.47 for further details), both of which are described more fully in box-outs in this section. The data and analysis in Nicole Gottschalck’s thesis, ‘The Eurocrisis – A European Crisis’, a content analysis of *Der Spiegel* (Germany) *L’Express* (France) and *The Economist* (UK), is also very helpful. This section also takes into account research projects that began before the economic downturn of 2008, which analyse other aspects of political representation in, or public discourse around, the EU in the media – such as those with a focus on the European public sphere. Some of these have incorporated research questions on ‘the economic crisis’ or ‘the Euro crisis’ or ‘the crisis of the EU’ in the later stages of their research, and have also been of use in preparing this paper.

Both the theoretical and practical limitations of locating ‘public discourse’ in the media, and particularly in the printed press, have been discussed at length in Section 3 and in the case studies, but there are also some methodological limitations that it is necessary to flag up here. For example, The Kriesi/Grande data refers to only one national newspaper in six countries – not only a limited data set on the ‘public debate’, but one that results in articles from a left-leaning paper in one country (eg *Le Monde*) are used comparatively to a right-leaning paper of another (eg *The Times*). The Reuters Institute study employs a more representative sample, aiming for a left, right, business and tabloid national newspaper in each country, but the researchers do not always achieve their aim, occasionally having to substitute one for another. A number of the teams also note that they had problems assigning ‘section’ categories in, for example, their chosen business publication, which was not divided into the typical ‘international’ ‘business’, ‘domestic’ etc. section; for other categories, some teams list missing data – although this may only be a temporary situation, as the full data sets are not due to be released until the end of 2014.

More problematic at a conceptual level is that of all the ‘11 major developmental periods’, or events, of the crisis selected by the Reuters Institute group for investigation, only one could be said to represent anything other than an ‘elite’ and institutional reaction. Ten of the eleven events are related to EU institutions and/or national political leaders, such as EU summits, European Commission papers/statements, IMF demands/agreements and the appointments/resignation/statements of national political leaders. Only one, the Greek General Strike of October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, could be said to represent a grassroots response to the crisis. This choice not only skews the data towards a crisis narrative dominated by executives (see below), but itself indicates how pervasive such a framing can be, in that it limits even where we expect evidence of the crisis to be. Of similar concern is that The Reuters

Institute project description states that the research aims to ascertain 'how Europeans understand the challenges facing the Euro, and the workings of the European Union and European Central Bank, through the news media of their countries.' (Reuters 2014). From the research completed and available already, it is unclear how these questions will be answered from the perspective of European citizens themselves; rather, every indication is that this project has investigated how the media (or rather a small subsection of the media) present 'the crisis' to citizens, *not* how citizens interpret this information. As Gottschalck notes in her conclusion, the discourse revealed in this data is a media discourse, and one that 'most probably correlates with patterns in elite discourses in Europe' (2012:64).

However, while these studies are limited, given the corporate networks of media ownership, it is not too much of a stretch to extrapolate from a selection of national newspapers to the 'mainstream media' as an entity. Thus the common themes found across these studies provide insight into how the media informs, frames and shapes the dominant crisis narrative.

## Themes

### The 'crisis' as an abstract given

As Kouki observes in the Greek study, the crisis has been referred to almost as a "supernatural phenomenon", and almost exclusively an economic one – with economics as an inevitable, "natural process", out of human hands (p.18). This is perpetuated across Europe by a media in which potential roots of the crisis are rarely given attention – in less than 30% of the articles studied by the Reuters Institute, for example – and, when discussed, 'general economic structure' as a potential causal factor is posited just over 1% of the time (Reuters Institute 2014). Compare this to the narrative of Occupy and of the *indignados*, or even to the manifestos of Europe's 'elite' activists, for whom the 'general economic structure' of neoliberal capitalism is a key concern. Or indeed, to the almost 28,000 interviewees to Eurobarometer's 'Future of Europe' survey (2014a), 49% of whom believe that 'social equality and solidarity' is the key area that society should emphasise 'in order to face major global challenges' – the top category in the survey, in which both 'progress and innovation' and 'protecting the economy' also were cited ahead of 'free trade market economy'. Neither do the media attribute cause to frustration with the political system, another defining claim for subterranean actors (see Kaldor and Selchow 2012) and one that is also reflected in the Eurobarometer data, with only one in four respondents trusting their government (2014b); yet only 4.2% of all articles discuss 'politics' as a potential root cause (Reuters Institute 2014).

### Suffering and 'the other'

While causal factors are ignored, the notion of 'suffering' caused by the crisis (and by extension, by the 'ineffectual or confused' EU institutions who are 'central' to its management – see below), is discussed in, around 50% of articles in the Reuters' study. Compounding this sense of misery, the home nation is typically one of the top five countries or regions most often 'depicted as primarily suffering the identified consequences of the Euro crisis' – alongside 'Greece', 'EU countries in

## The Reuters Institute: The Euro Crisis, Media Coverage and Perceptions of Europe within the EU

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism was formed in 1996 as an international research centre focusing on the comparative study of international journalism, and is part of the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. ‘The Euro Crisis, Media Coverage and Perceptions of Europe within the EU’ is a large-scale ten-country study coordinated by the Institute, with the contributions of teams working in Belgium and the Netherlands (Institute for Media Studies at KU Leuven); France (Sociologie et de Science politique de la Sorbonne Université Paris); Germany (the Institut für Publizistik at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität); Greece (School of Journalism and Mass Media Studies, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki); Italy (Dipartimento Istituzioni e Società at University of Perugia); Finland (Communication Research Centre, University of Helsinki); Poland (Institute for Journalism and Social Communication, University of Wrocław); and Spain (School of Communication, University of Navarra), in addition to the Oxford team, which is looking at the UK.

The teams are ‘investigating how European news coverage has portrayed Europe, European institutions, EU members and the Euro, what that coverage tell us about Europe, and the implications of the way the sovereign debt and banking crises has been covered’ (Reuters Institute 2014). In order to do this, the group chose ‘11 major developmental periods’ (events) related to ‘the Euro crisis’ between 2010 and 2012, from the EU Summit of February 4-10 2010 to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s insistence on the need for adherence to budget targets and European monitoring in July 2012. Four newspapers were selected in each country: ideally the leading newspapers espousing conservative and liberal views, the leading financial/business newspaper, and the leading tabloid or, in the absence of a tabloid, newspaper ‘representing’ centrist views. The selected newspapers have been searched using the terms EURO and CRISIS, or their national linguistic equivalents, for the seven days prior to and following the events, and 26 variables coded for, including: the genres of stories and in what section of the newspaper the articles were found, sources of the article and of the quotes within the article, the attributed roots of the ‘crisis’ and the actors and mechanisms attributed/suggested as solutions, and who was cited as suffering from or benefiting from both the Euro as currency and the ‘crisis’ of the Euro. As of May 2014, Basic National Results reports have been produced on Belgium, Germany, Italy, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the UK. These reports are available online. In-depth analysis of each country and the full dataset should be available by the end of 2014, with thematic studies to be the subject of a book expected in 2015.

*<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/research/research-focus-areas/business-and-financial-reporting/the-euro-crisis-media-coverage-and-perceptions-of-europe-within-the-eu.html>*

general’ and ‘Southern countries’. Additionally, if ‘harm’ was attributed to the Euro currency in articles, it was most likely to be considered a harm to one’s own economy. Indeed, in Germany, Italy and Spain, those countries respectively were the most likely to be portrayed as the primary sufferer of the crisis, and in polls German interviewees were the most likely to cite ‘public debt’ as the EU’s biggest challenge – while that category was not cited in the top two for any other country except Estonia (Eurobarometer 2014a).

Suffering and blame are both aspects of the role of the ‘other’ in crisis discourse, discussed by Charlotte Galpin in her paper presented at the EUI conference on ‘European Identities in Times of Crisis’ (June 2012). She notes that while ‘there is evidence that the Eurozone crisis could function in some contexts as an external Other to bring together the European community in the face of adversity’ (Galpin 2012: 4), with the media at times evoking European solidarity and history to legitimise EU policies for prosperity and peace, ‘the challenge for European identities will come when internal Others start to emerge in the discourse. This will risk a breakdown in European solidarities, identities and signal a re-assertion of national interests and identities’ (*ibid*: 6). Galpin lists examples of such othering that are echoed in the case studies, such as the ‘incompetency’ of Greece, the ‘Nazi’-like behavior of Germany, and the ‘power-hungry’ EU (*ibid*: 7). This process of ‘othering’ is supported across different categories in the Reuters’ and Kriesi/Grande research, in addition to the nation-centric ‘suffering’ described above. For example, articles on the crisis were more likely to be placed in the ‘international section’ than the ‘domestic’, and were significantly more likely to have either a European and/or foreign framing than a domestic one.

#### An integrated European discourse ...

This framing of the crisis as ‘European’ or ‘foreign’ is important in another sense, for there appears to be something of a paradox going on here. While the support for nationalist and specifically Eurosceptic parties across Europe grows increasingly stronger, as evidenced by the recent elections, and while many centrist and conservative parties feel the need to pay lip-service, at least, to this groundswell of anti-integration sentiment, the media discourse on the crisis ‘is characterized by both *vertical* Europeanization (indicated by the prominence of ... supranational actors) and *horizontal* Europeanization (indicated by the prominence of national executives from other countries)’ (Kriesi and Grande, 2014). Here, they are referring to Koopmans and Statham’s (2010) distinction, where *vertical Europeanisation* indicates ‘communicative linkages’ between actors at the national and European level, either from the bottom-up or top-down, and *horizontal Europeanisation* indicates links between actors of nationalities (either via weak links, where the media covers debates within another country; or strong links, where political actors explicitly address or partake in the debate in a country outside of their own). This is a pattern observed in the Belgian case study (p.35), with the UK – and David Cameron specifically – playing a starring role in stories on the crisis in the right-wing *La Libre*; France and Nicolas Sarkozy in the left-leaning *Le Soir*. Data from the Reuters report and the Gottshalck study tells the same story: government leaders, and typically foreign government leaders, not national politicians, are the dominant source of stories on the crisis. And in all these data sets<sup>26</sup>,

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<sup>26</sup> With the exception of the Gottshalck study, in which *L’Express* features marginally more coverage of Sarkozy; this may in part be explained by the fact that this content analysis was for a shorter period, from 2010-11.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is by far the most dominant individual source in every country but the UK<sup>27</sup>, typically receiving at least twice the number of mentions of any individual. Even in those countries suffering the worst of the economic fallout, as Kouki notes in the Greek study, the emphasis has shifted over time from ‘cultural particularities ... towards the systemic nature of the Europe-wide crisis’ (p.18). Both policy makers and the media therefore portray a Europe ‘in crisis’ and on the verge of disintegration whilst themselves part of a process that is increasingly integrated at the European level.

... with a national framing

Notably, across the datasets, Germany was the only country where 'supranational actors' were dwarfed by 'national actors' in the crisis debate. But does this really make Germany an outlier? For a start, given that Merkel is the most featured actor, it is hardly surprising that in Germany the figures are skewed towards the domestic. But this apparent anomaly actually indicates an overarching theme: that although media coverage of the crisis features the same actors and events, the national still has a significant impact on framing. As Gottshalck notes of her analysis of *Der Spiegel* (Germany) *L'Express* (France) and *The Economist* (UK), ‘in the end, what we can observe is an indirect cross-border dialogue about issues of mutual concern between three very different media-publics operating in a very European environment’ (2012: 66), where the concerns are the same, but the conclusions different.

The importance of national context<sup>28</sup> to perceptions of the crisis is reflected in the case studies in this paper, and is evident in the latest figures from Eurobarometer (2014b), which indicate that views on everything from the health of the national economy to immigration vary according to the nationality of the interviewees and the state of ‘economic recovery’ of their nation. And yet, as already noted, articles on the ‘eurocrisis’ are almost never found in the ‘domestic’ section – on average, less than 6% of the time according to the Reuters Institute data – but rather discussed in a utilitarian techno-economic frame in the business and international pages. It would appear that the impacts of the crisis at domestic levels, such as unemployment levels and rising inequality, become national issues in media discourse, separate from the broader ‘euro crisis’ – even though respondents to the Eurobarometer poll cited ‘unemployment’ as the main challenge for the EU, positing it as a trans-national, not national problem (2014a). Is this in part due to the vested interests of the media, as Kouki suggests (p.17)? Bonafont, referring to long-term data from the Spanish Policy Agendas Project, notes that in Spain, ‘the papers always talk about the bad news [in national terms], and, being partisan, push the bad news onto the opposing party ... there is a lot of blame-shifting’ (OSIFE 2013).

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<sup>27</sup> Although in the Kriesi and Grande, 2014 study, which only looked at The Times, Merkel takes 11% of individual mentions in the UK compared to Cameron’s 5.9%, a discrepancy that supports our concerns on the limitations and biases of data-driven research).

<sup>28</sup> And regional – notably between the north-western and southern states.

## Kriesi and Grande: The Euro-Crisis and the Politicization of European Integration?

The two scholars (at the European University Institute and Munich, respectively) and their teams have been working on two major research projects investigating the politicisation of European integration and the existence/impact of a European public sphere. 'National Political Change in a Globalizing World' and 'Politicising Europe'. Together, the projects include election data from the mid-70s to the end of the 2000s; data from public debates on globalisation from 2004-6; and data from what the researchers call 'public debates' on the Euro-crisis: namely a 'core sentence' MDS (multi-dimensional scaling; see Kriesi et al. 2012: 58f) analysis of one 'quality' newspaper from six countries, all Northern European and all considered 'creditor' nations in the context of the crisis, or nations 'sharing the creditors' point of view' (Kriesi and Grande 2014a:, 10): Austria (*Die Presse*), France (*Le Monde*), Germany (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*), Sweden (*Svenska Dagbladet*), Switzerland (*Neue Züricher Zeitung*) and the UK (*The Times*). This 'crisis data' spans the time period of December 2009 to March 2012, from which period they took sample of all articles from 'the national and international politics and economy ('not finance/markets') sections that mentioned the Euro-crisis in the title, lead or first paragraph' (*ibid*: 11) – or more specifically, the search string (euro\* near5 crisis\*) OR (stability pact OR bailout fund OR debt crisis), in each nation's respective language (footnote 5).

While their work on the crisis was done specifically to ask questions concerning the politicization process of European integration – 'has the Euro-crisis contributed to the politicization of the European integration process', rather than having a focus on public discourse per se, as they consider 'the salience of [an] issue in the public to be a necessary condition for politicization' (*ibid*: 3), thus the 'public discourse' is central to their work – while their empirical research is comparable both in methods and findings to that of the Reuters Institute group. Within their limited data set, the team looked for the types of predominant actors (EU institutions, domestic/national/supranational executives, national/foreign/European parties, and 'others') participating in these 'debates', the country of origin of these actors, and those individual actors who featured most predominantly; the primary issues and the positioning of actors on these issues; the framing of these issues (nationalistic, multi-cultural or universalistic, or cultural), and the salience and development of the politicization of the overall 'Euro-crisis' debate by country and over time. Grande and Kreispi were kind enough to share with us their drafts for two edited volumes due to be published later in the year, by Cambridge and Oxford University Press. All work cited is from their draft chapters.

## A discourse of elites

Perhaps the crisis discourse is not one of European integration, then, as much as it is one of European elites. Both in the political discourse that is mediated by the press, and in the so-called ‘public discourse’ around the crisis that the press, at least in part, constitutes (see Section 3). The former is a narrative in which national government leaders meet with EU and other international organisation bureaucrats around the continent in an attempt to ‘fix’ the euro, the economic crisis and the behaviour of unruly members of the EU. The data portrays a ‘debate’ that is dominated by ‘executives’, then bankers and financiers<sup>29</sup>. National politicians barely get to contribute to the narrative, whilst ‘society representatives’ are mentioned as sources less than 10% of the time in every country except Poland (Reuters 2014). Nor are articles on the crisis found with any frequency in the ‘features’ section of newspapers, the space where one is most likely to find issues that affect individual and community lives (less than 4% on average, according to the Reuters Institute (2014) data). If this is the ‘public discourse’, it is one in which the majority of the public are not included. One could argue that the structural nature of the EU lends itself to rule by executives and bureaucrats, but even if this were the case, data from Kriesi and Grande (2014a) suggest that the crisis has intensified this: in articles on the Lisbon Treaty in 2004/6, only 4.6% of ‘EU institutional and IMF’ actors featured, compared to 27.7% on the crisis, and only 6.1% of foreign executives, compared to 38.5%, while members of national parties were far more prominent. Given the disregard of Europe as a political space for the majority of the subterranean actors interviewed in the Subterranean Politics project (Kaldor and Selchow 2012), one might claim that the media is simply featuring those actors who *are* taking part in ‘eurocrisis’ debates. But that only holds if one accepts the narrative in which the crisis is the ‘eurocrisis’: a solely economic one, and an abstract given rather than a series of political choices. As already suggested, the Subterranean Politics data, Eurobarometer polls and case studies featured in this paper indicate that this is a political crisis as much as an economic one.

## Perpetuating the invisibility of Europe as a political space

No wonder, then, that both subterranean activists and Eurosceptic voters do not see Europe as a valid political space: the Europe of the crisis is not framed as a political arena for anyone but premiers and trans-continental bureaucrats. Neither is the EU presented as being of great value, beyond its role as an ‘economic trading power’ – reflected in this being the top choice of ‘EU’s main asset’ of respondents in the Eurobarometer polls (2014a). Benefits of the euro as a currency are discussed, on average, in less than 5% of all articles (Reuters 2014). Furthermore, when the EU institutions are discussed in articles referring to the crisis – which ranges from over 60% of the time for the EU’s ‘host’ country, Belgium, to less than ten% of mentions in the British press – although they are regularly described as ‘central to addressing the crisis’, they are equally likely to be portrayed as ‘ineffectual or confused’. The dominant narrative, then, does not portray an EU of worth. As Mattes relates in the Spanish study, prior to the worst of the crisis, only 26% of survey respondents knew that Spain was a net receiver of

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<sup>29</sup> The Reuters Institute uses the most specific distinctions for their coding. Kriesi and Grande (2014a) do not categorise beyond ‘EU institutional and IMF’ (which presumably includes economists) and various executive and party classifications; Gottshalck (2012) also focuses on executives, institutions and states, although she does include a section on ‘banks, rating agencies and markets’.

EU funds (p.27); a full 10% of respondents in the Eurobarometer poll stated, *spontaneously*<sup>30</sup>, that the EU ‘has no main assets’.

Since 2003, a team at the University of Bremen have been working on the project ‘The Transnationalization of Public Spheres in Europe: Citizen's Reactions’, one of a number of large-scale research projects carried out in the past decade on the European public sphere. Phase Three, which looks at ‘the effects of Europeanization processes on media appropriation and on conceptions of legitimate governance and collective identity among newspaper readers in Europe’, has a particular focus on the impact of the crisis, but will not be complete until the end of 2014. However, their research to date has found that although there has been a trans-nationalisation of the discourse ‘monitoring governance’ of the EU, there has only been a very weak trend toward the creation of collective identities, and *stagnation* regarding mutual observation and discursive exchange. In other words, there is a ‘segmented Europeanisation’, and a ‘multi-segmented European public sphere ... European governance is increasingly subject to public scrutiny, but common discourse in Europe does not intensify and a sense of belonging to the same community is rarely evoked in public debates, [but rather] ... segmented according to national political discourse cultures.’ (Public Sphere Research Group, 2013). The data from the research projects cited here suggests similar: a crisis narrative of a high degree of European integration at the executive level, kept at arm’s length from the reach of domestic politics and civil society.

In the Greek study, Kouki traces the deepening hegemony of the dominant discourse, in which “people’s experiences, fears and anxieties, their anger and their future ... cannot fit in the polarised discourse that permeates the public sphere ... anyone who attempts to articulate a point of view beyond the mainstream one finds themselves in [unwilling] position of opposition” (p.20) This appears to be increasingly true across the continent, with a notable absence of positive solutions beyond ‘fixing’ economic growth to pre-crisis status. As Gerbaudo points out (OSIFE 2013), of the two primary counter-discourses vying for the European crisis narrative, none currently offers a convincing alternative to the economic crisis of technocratic liberalism which dominates the mainstream press. Across Europe, the populist discourse may come from the left or right, and is likely to blend ideas from both (such as the 5 Star Movement’s call for both a guaranteed income and restrictive immigration policies). Anti-elitist, generally nationalist and Eurosceptic, it is predominantly negative towards the European project, thus supporting the media’s themes of suffering and othering (see below). Meanwhile, there is a progressive left discourse ‘in the shadows’ – but it is a discourse of manifestos, and of solutions that sound as technical as those proposed by EU ‘bureaucrats’. As Gerbaudo notes, ‘you’re never going to get people coming out to demonstrate for Eurobonds’ (*ibid*).

There are signs that the public may be becoming more receptive to such ‘technical’ proposals; that with the information available to them online, conditions are changing and leading to more informed, issue-based debates. For example, recent YouGov polls in the UK demonstrated support for an end to the cycle of privatisation, from those who identify as politically conservative, not only on moral grounds but on the grounds that it is now increasingly seen as inefficient (Dahlgreen 2013; Jordan

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<sup>30</sup> i.e. they were not offered ‘no main assets’ as an option by the interviewer.

2013). We shall return to this in the conclusion; suffice to note here, as the figures above indicate, that for the time being, the crisis narrative as framed by the media is primarily a singular one.

In commenting on the agenda-setting ability of those who control the media discourse, Dijk, writing in 1997, worried that ‘if recipients have no alternative information or no access to other discourses, the credibility and persuasive rhetoric of public discourse may be such that many recipients will adopt the beliefs expressed by these biased discourses.’ (Dijk 1997b: 22). Given the significant decline in trust since then in both the media and government (Eurobarometer 2014b), and the frustrations with democracy evident in not only subterranean politics, but the resonance of subterranean politics in mainstream society (Kaldor and Selchow 2012), what is perhaps of more concern today is that ‘the growing public cynicism and distrust of the information contained in news reporting suggests that these essential political communication practices may be undermining the legitimacy of government itself’ (Bennett and Entman 2001: 22).

## Conclusion and Implications

What has emerged from this study of evolving public discourses in Europe is a gap between a trans-European elite, who are preoccupied with the crisis of the *euro*, and with the broader ‘public’ – with the citizens who constitute the European Union. What both the elite and the broader public share is a tendency to view ‘the crisis’ as an abstract given – a deterministic phenomenon, something that just happened. The abstract nature of this crisis rules out any discussion of agency, of the cause of the crisis, or of how the crisis might be overcome; indeed one of the findings is that there is a lack of in-depth coverage of the potential political and economic roots of the crisis. Another is that the impacts of the crisis are typically treated separately to the trans-European political machinations of the ‘eurocrisis’; rather, they are framed with national and regional contexts, to be dealt with accordingly. At the same time, the interpretation of ‘European’ as foreign means that blame can be apportioned on the ‘other’ – the European whom we are not. This is profoundly dangerous. The more that the media and policy makers play into this discourse, the more it gains momentum – and both the coverage and results of the recent European elections have shown just how willing both are to take up this narrative under the guise of ‘listening to the people’. To what extent this dominant narrative is one that the media discourse constitutes is arguable and warrants further investigation, but there is little doubt that, currently, credible alternatives are not seriously challenging this dominant narrative. The recent elections are a case in point – the British press, for example, gave extensive coverage to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), but very little to the Green Party, or to emerging parties that support European integration with a progressive agenda such as the Europeans Party ([www.europeansparty.org](http://www.europeansparty.org)). As noted in the conclusion of Section 6, the significant decline in trust across Europe in both the media and government (Eurobarometer 2014b) suggests that the failure of the political and media discourse to ensure that the public discourse functions as a keystone of democracy ‘may be undermining the legitimacy of government itself’ (Bennett and Entman 2001: 22).

The main implications are twofold. First, both policymakers and the media need to take responsibility for reversing this dangerous descent into nationalism; they need to be ready to go against the grain of the evolving discourse of Euro-scepticism. Political parties have evolved from being *fora* for debate about the ‘public interest’ (regardless of how paternalistic and/or misinformed that take on the ‘public interest’ might have been) into electoral machines that only seem capable of echoing and reinforcing already existing prejudices gleaned from a heavily mediated ‘public discourse’. In the wake of the elections, party promises of referenda and to take Euro-sceptic and anti-immigration attitudes on board actually closes the debate; it is a refuge in populism that prevents the pressing discussions that are needed on the problems of democracy.

Secondly, and in order to accomplish this, Europe must be politicized. At the present time, the general picture that the European media paints is of Europe as a bureaucracy; a foreign entity; the domain of political executives. For European citizens, there is no European politics; worse, there is anti-politics. During the recent elections, there was almost no ‘public’ discussion about future European officials, and even less on European policies; the electorate voted for national parties, not European ones. Europe needs a political face. Elections for a European President could help in this direction, but would still result in an executive face. Procedural changes that result in elections that are trans-

national, based on residence rather than nationality, which promote cross-European parties and which take place at a different time from local and national elections, in order to shift the focus to European issues, are all desirable. But such procedures only make sense if they are associated with a different set of policies that allow for democratisation at the substantive level.

The democratic deficit needs to be filled with more than just mechanisms; it needs better political conversations. Or, in other words, *substantive* democracy, one that “is achieved when those who are subject to law believe that they are also potential authors of the law” (Post 2011; see Section 3); in which all citizens are able to participate in the formation of public opinion and subsequently influence the decisions that affect their lives in Europe and as Europeans. And in order to do this, it is necessary to engage with European citizens. By this, we do not mean another European Year of Citizens, nor the various EU civil society initiatives, nor advertising campaigns such as the recent last-minute attempts to alert British voters to the European elections. Rather, national policymakers and national media need to engage with their citizens *as* Europeans, developing new deliberative and dialogic forms of politics. There need to be substantive discussions on the nature of the crisis, and on the many proposed solutions put forward by both the subterranean actors and civil society ‘elite activists’ that we reported on in *The ‘Bubbling Up’ of Subterranean Politics in Europe* (Kaldor and Selchow 2012).

There is a need, in other words, to look for ‘the public discourse’ beyond the usual suspects – or, rather, for public *discourses*, to borrow from Nancy Fraser’s (1990) argument that there is not one public sphere but many. The political discourse and media discourse that currently dominate the so-called ‘public discourse’ is self-reinforcing; what is needed instead is a discourse that is open, rather than one that presents no alternatives; one that is able to devolve what are currently seen as national in both directions – to the local *and* to the trans-national; one that engages with subterranean actors on issues of neo-liberalism, austerity, privatisation and democracy, and which actively looks for solutions outside those prescribed by the dominant narrative.

To some conservative critics, this may seem like the stuff of fantasy. But the eruption of subterranean politics over the past few years, and the resonance of these political initiatives with the broader public, suggest many chinks where it is increasingly possible to get purchase on the dominant crisis discourse. We merely note two of the broadest here:

- Discuss economics, not just ‘the economic crisis’. Perhaps the most obvious place to engage in a discussion of alternatives is on economic structure, given that the dominant narrative portrays an almost exclusively *economic* crisis. The popularity of books such as Ha-Joon Chang’s *23 Things They Don’t Tell You About Capitalism* (Penguin 2010) and Thomas Piketty’s much-debated *Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press 2014) show that there is an appetite for such a substantive discussion, and one that, by being taken up by the public, is chipping away at the dominant crisis narrative from ‘the bottom-up’. Although it initially appear paradoxical, then, genuine engagement with the economics of the crisis – in other words, one that considers economic roots and solutions to the crisis as political choices – would be a major step in the recognising its political nature.

- Make visible the positives of European integration – and the reality of an already-integrated region – moving the debate from one that looks backward to one that acknowledges the present and looks to the future. Research currently being undertaken with Bosnian and Ukrainian activists by the Unit for Civil Society and Human Security at the LSE suggest that a fruitful place to locate such a counter-discourse at the present time would be in the borderlands of Europe: in Bosnia, the Ukraine, Turkey. Initial work suggests that from here Europe looks very different. As one young Ukrainian activist put it, ‘Europe offers the promises of rules – transparency, accountability – to counter corruption. It’s not about ethnicity, it’s about procedures’ (Sarejevo interviews, 2014). As with the testimonies of those who lived during the erection of the Welfare State and are now protesting at its dismantling (Hessel, 2010), narratives from the borderlands could help to bring into focus European positives – and force a debate on the ways in which the institutionalisation of these procedures has weakened their transformative power in the West. Concerned primarily with social justice and as resistant to ‘neoliberalism’ as their Western peers, these young activists nevertheless put forward a positive European discourse, which we believe merits further research and engagement.

## Future research

To complement the work that the Unit is developing with subterranean activists in Eastern Europe and Turkey, the *Euro Crisis in the Press* team will be engaging in Summer/Autumn 2014 in an interdisciplinary, quantitative and qualitative analysis of press coverage throughout the crisis in Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. Its empirical findings will be discussed at a workshop at the University of Gothenburg in December 2014, will generate peer-review journal articles, but will also feed into a guest-edited policy report for the LSE think tank IDEAS on the theme of ‘Remaking Europe’, to feed into LSE’s contribution to the next Dahrendorf symposium. The report will look at how substantive democracy might be better achieved within the Union, while suggesting ways in which the EU might further enhance its status as a global actor by helping to spread and operationalise democratic norms, not least in the borderlands.

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## Conclusion and Implications

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